# How can injustice be reduced in practice? : A philosophical and empirical exploration of ways to promote justice

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# How can injustice be reduced in practice? : A philosophical and empirical exploration of ways to promote justice

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**Abstract**

The idea of justice has long been debated by philosophers, as has the issue of how such theoretical debates may contribute to reducing injustice in practice. The thesis aims to contribute to these long-lasting debates by a two-fold methodology of philosophical discussion and empirical exploration.

In the first place, the thesis draws on the literature on theories of justice to develop a theoretical model which specifies both a model of justice and a potential path to promote it. As the foundational building block, it takes Amartya Sen's theoretical framework of justice, and the features it proposes of pragmatism, open-endedness, and the centrality of public reasoning. However, it argues that this alone is not sufficient. Despite great strengths, Sen's framework has three limits: it does not have a normative criterion by which the extent of justice may be assessed; there remain idealisations in its concept of public reasoning; and it conceptualises public reasoning in an over-individualised way. Thus, the thesis proposes that Sen's theoretical framework of justice needs to be augmented, by the normative criterion of 'equal dignity' on the one hand, and the dynamic expression of public reasoning encapsulated in Nancy Fraser's concept of 'subaltern counter publics' on the other.

In the second place, the thesis embarks on an empirical exploration by applying the model to real-world contexts where struggles for justice are taking place so as to gain empirical feedback. Firstly, by using other scholars' studies, it examines whether injustice is actually reduced through the operation of subaltern counter publics as theorised in the model. Secondly, by utilising fieldwork data from my own primary study in West Bengal, India, it brings to light the dynamic and complex operation of a subaltern counter public. It then explores how the subaltern counter public has emerged and evolved over the years. In so doing, it develops the model further with practical implications to guide actions and policies for the promotion of greater justice.

# Chapter 1 Introduction

## 1. Theorising justice matters

Amid Black Lives Matter demonstrations sweeping across the United States in May 2020, on a bridge in Charlotte, North Carolina, two black protesters were having a fierce discussion. Along with many others, they were protesting racial profiling and police violence against black people. Their discussion was about how they should take forward the fight against racial injustice. Proposing to use more violent means to get their voice heard, the 45-year-old shouted 'It's time to stand up! At this point, I am ready to die for what is going on!' The 31-year-old roared out back 'I understand! But this (violent means) ain't the way!' and brought a 16-year-old into the discussion. Pointing to the teenage boy who appeared to be somewhat puzzled, the 45-year-old protester claimed 'He gotta stand up for what he gotta stand up for (even by using violent means)'. But, the younger man argued 'Putting yourself in harm's way is not the way!' His voice breaking, he went on to tell the teenage boy that even though he did peaceful marches 4 years ago for the same cause, 'it (a positive change) ain't happening'. Shedding tears, he tasked the teenage boy to '*come up with a better way'*. Their discussion was captured on camera as a window into generations of black protest and was watched more than 20 million times on a variety of media platforms (McCarthy, 2020; Pelletiere, 2020). This powerful protest moment moved millions of viewers to reflect upon what Black Lives Matter demonstrators protest against and ponder over what actions are both necessary and right to bring about changes for the better.

I propose that theorising justice has a place to contribute to this momentous task of '*coming up with a better way'*. First of all, theorisation of justice provides an analytical lens through which real-world phenomena are better understood. This virtue is exemplified by the idea of justice itself. While there is no generally accepted definition of justice (Robeyns, 2009, 2017), in practice, debates on justice centre on 'how the good and bad things in life should be distributed among the members of a human society' (Miller, 1999, p.1). More concretely, when theorists are arguing about justice, they 'are claiming that a person, or more usually a category of persons, enjoys fewer advantages than that person or group of persons ought to enjoy (or bears more of the burdens than they ought to bear), given how other members of the society in question are faring' (Miller 1999, p. 1). Thus, in reference to the idea of justice, when protesters of Black Lives Matter arguing for justice, they are claiming that black people enjoy fewer advantages than they ought to enjoy and bear more of the burdens than they ought to bear given how other members of the society in question are faring.

Secondly, paying attention to theories of justice helps us question aspects of public policy that are so common that they are simply taken for granted. One such instance is the use of Gross Domestic Product as the supreme public policy goal.

This policy decision rests on utilitarianism which is commonly seen as a teleological theory of justice and identifies justice as the political and economic settlement which provides 'the greatest good of the greatest number' (Barry and Matravers, 2005).[1] In the guise of welfare economics, cost-benefit analysis and law, the reasoning inspired by utilitarianism has been widely shared among those who are in charge of actual policy making and implementation such as government officials, judges and policy analysts (Freeman, 2012). Serving as a compass to make 'just' decisions, the utilitarian-inspired reasoning has encouraged them to take the most effective means to achieve an end with the simplest, least costly and time consuming, most probable ways, often neglecting citizens' basic rights and freedom (Rawls, 1999; Sen, 1999; Nussbaum, 2000, 2006; Sen, 2006, 2009; Freeman, 2012; Satz, 2012; Vazquez, 2016; Robeyns, 2017).

Thirdly, although theorising justice may seem a distant activity, carried out largely by academic philosophers and influencing a handful of policy makers, it is consequential on our everyday life and action. This is because, as Wittgenstein (2001) proposed, language works by triggering pictures of how things are in our mind. Value-laden words like 'justice' and 'injustice' are not simply neutral but demand a response. They prompt us to reflect upon what is wrong in the society or world and what actions are needed to put it right. Thus, conceiving the idea of justice in emancipatory ways can become a driver for people to question and challenge the status quo (Deneulin, 2014; Vazquez, 2016; Satz 2012). For instance, the idea of a just society proposed by Martin Luther King Jr – a society in which people would be judged only by the content of their character and not their skin color – has played and continues to play a role in mobilising people against racial injustice (Satz, 2012). Being inspired by his idea of justice, the recent Black Lives Matter demonstrators show that they are still ready to fight for civil rights of black people even in the face of many practical obstacles. Their action has also triggered important response by some governments and individuals to promote racial justice.

My aim in this thesis is to theorise justice in a way that provides a systematic framework to help people better understand the issues of justice and injustice on the ground. Furthermore, in the light of the thought-provoking and action-guiding nature, I aim to render my theorisation of justice to serve as a practical guide which helps galvanise justice-promoting changes on the ground. Ultimately, the thesis is an attempt to contribute to '*coming up with a better way*' to reduce injustices in practice.

[1] While there exist different versions of utilitarianism, its tenet is that 'the ground of justification (for resolving the issues of justice) is human wellbeing, happiness or 'utility'. When the utility of different people conflicts, the criterion for bringing their interests into relationship with one another is that aggregate utility is to be maximized' (Barry and Matravers, 2005, p.482).

## 2. Theorising justice: theory and practice

While the idea of justice is consequential for the kinds of lives that we would lead, the development of the literature on theories of justice in the late 20th century took a turn which undermines this critical attribute of justice theorising. In 1971, John Rawls published *A Theory of Justice* which is regarded as the single most important written piece on justice in the 20th century. Theorising justice both from social contract and egalitarian perspectives, Rawls (1971, p.22) challenged the utilitarian theorisation of justice which hold 'society is rightly ordered, and therefore just, when its major institutions are arranged so as to achieve the greatest net balance of satisfaction summed over all the individuals belonging to it'. Rawls's *A Theory of Justice* depicted a utopian society where each citizen's conception of the good life is respected and they are enabled to lead such a life. In so doing, Rawls carried out idealisations – i.e., 'idealised assumptions, which make social reality appear significantly 'simpler and better' than it actually is' (Valentini, 2009, p.332) – on two counts: the society is self-contained, populated with fully capable adults and exists under favourable natural and historical conditions (Rawls, 1971, pp.4-8), and citizens will be fully compliant to the principles Rawls lays out (Rawls, 1971, pp.4-5). Rawls (1971, p.9) prioritised such ideal theorisation of justice with the belief that ideal theory as a portrait of a utopian society 'provides…the only basis for the systematic grasp of these more pressing problems (that we are faced with in everyday life)'.

In *Political Liberalism* (1993), Rawls makes two important shifts. Firstly, he does not treat his 'justice as fairness' – i.e., the society he depicted in *A Theory of Justice* (1971) – as 'the only comprehensive philosophical doctrine' of the utopian society (Rawls, 1993, p.xi). He argues that his 'justice as fairness' is the embodiment of a most reasonable 'political conception of justice' while acknowledging that 'in any actual society, a number of differing liberal political conceptions of justice compete with one another in society's political debates' (Rawls, 1993, p.xIvi). Secondly, he emphasises that *A Theory of Justice* and *Political Liberalism* have practical implications as they 'attempt to say how a reasonably just and well-ordered democratic society might be possible' and 'will shape the underlying attitudes of the public culture and the conduct of politics' (Rawls, 1993, pp. Iviii-Iix). In 1999, Rawls published the revised version of his *A Theory of Justice*. While 'its main outlines' and 'central doctrines' are the same as the 1971 version, the 1999 version contains two major revisions regarding his accounts of 'the basic rights and liberties and their priority' (Rawls, 1999, pp.52-75) and 'primary goods' (Rawls, 1999, pp.78-80). Despite these changes to date, his works are generally seen as comprising ideal theorisation of a just society (Valentini, 2009; Owen, 2016).

As a result, many liberal egalitarian theorists of justice began to follow suit with Rawls's ideal theorising, predominantly concentrating on laying out just institutions

and principles with numerous idealisations (Sen, 2006; Robeyns, 2008; Sen, 2009; Valentini, 2009; Robeyns, 2017). As the focus on ideal theorising of a utopian society came to be dominant, many theorists of justice began to raise a serious criticism of how theories of justice too detached from social reality can be conducive to actually promoting justice (Wolff, 1998; Sen, 2006; Mills, 2005; Farrelly, 2007, cited by Robeyns, 2008). The criticism also ignited the debate on the merits and limits of ideal theories in terms of offering practical guidance to promote justice on the ground (Freeman, 2012; Satz, 2012; Valentini, 2009; Robeyns, 2008). Some theorists defended the Rawlsian form of ideal theorising, arguing that knowing how a utopian society looks would help us critique social reality, in particular by focusing on the institutions (Valentini, 2009; Freeman, 2012). Others argued that ideal theories and principles in general would play a role of showing us the ultimate goal toward which society should move (Robeyns, 2008; Osmani, 2010; Vazquez, 2016). Nevertheless, in her systematic analysis of ideal theories, Robeyns (2008, p. 352) pointed out that the role of ideal theories is rather limited because they are 'only one part in a large chain before any change of justice may be reached (in practice)'. Instead, Robeyns (2008, p. 347) underscored the indispensability of non-ideal theories which provide 'the theoretical foundations for figuring out what we have to do in order to move closer to that (utopian) society'.

Other theorists have contributed to addressing the criticism by theorising justice from a more practical perspective, and among them are theorists of the capability approach. The capability approach is a broad evaluative framework whose core proposition is to assess states of affairs by focusing on people's capabilities – that is, what people are effectively able to be or do (Sen, 1985, 1992a, 1999; Nussbaum, 2000).[2] Over the past decades, the literature has grown as an intellectual discipline which accommodates both theoretical and empirical research and thus is more oriented to contributing to the improvement of the lives that people would be able to lead (Alkire, 2002; Comim, Qizilbash and Alkire, 2008; Charles, 2012; Ibrahim and Tiwari, 2014). In recent years, some of the capability approach theorists advanced non-ideal theorisations of justice which help to analyse systematically real-world contexts where injustice exists (Deneulin, 2014; Vazquez, 2016), while others in the literature proposed a more applied and grounded theorisation of justice which may serve as a practical guidance to inform public policies (Comim, 2018).

Among these contributions, the theoretical framework of justice developed by

[2] Despite its predominant use of capabilities as an informational base, the capability approach is also characterised by informational pluralism (Bruni et al., 2008; Alkire et al., 2008). That is, in assessing states of affairs, the capability approach, in its broad sense, does not exclude the use of other informational bases such as happiness/subjective wellbeing and access to resources. For an extensive and illuminating discussion on informational pluralism, see Comim (2008).

Amartya Sen (2006, 2010) is seminal.[3] This is because Sen's framework proposed a procedure to move a society toward the just direction, and thus took a concrete step to exploring how justice theorising can be conducive to actually reducing injustice on the ground. Sen (2006, p.237) started his arguments by fully admitting that 'the world in which we live is not only unjust, it is arguably extraordinarily unjust'. Then, he proceeded to advocate that therefore, 'it is not frivolous to seek a framework for a theory of justice that concentrates on advancement (of justice)', rather than focusing on depicting a utopian society. Strongly criticising the dominant forms of ideal theories as 'transcendental ideal theories' and 'all or nothing extremism', Sen (2006, 2009) proposed a theoretical framework which helps us with making comparisons of states of affairs in real-world contexts. Sen (2006, 2009) claimed that his framework of justice is directly applicable to non-ideal empirical contexts, and thus has potential to guide us toward a less unjust society or world.

This thesis builds on Sen and other capability theorists' attempts to reorient justice theorising from ideal to practice so as to offer a practical guide to reduce injustice on the ground. Thus, the ultimate object of this thesis is to provide an answer to the critical inquiry of ***how justice theorising can be conducive to reducing injustice on the ground***. To this end, the thesis engages in both philosophical discussion and empirical explorations, and synthesises the outcome of each into ***a theoretical model for reducing injustice***.[4] The model is an answer to the critical inquiry as it acts as a useful guide for those who wish to promote justice to decide what actions and policies are conducive to promoting justice in practice. The following section lays out the research question and methodology to develop the model.

## 3. Research question and methodology

In order to navigate its discussions throughout, the thesis sets up the research

[3] Sen's theoretical framework of justice was initially sketched out in his paper *What do we want from a theory of justice?* (2006) and further elaborated upon in his *The Idea of Justice* (2009). In 2012, at the symposium on *The Idea of Justice* held at the Rutgers University, he made a response to theorists' comments on his theoretical framework. Thus, the thesis mainly draws on these works to present Sen's theoretical framework of justice.

[4] The thesis follows the distinctions discussed by Qizilbash (2016) and Robeyns (2017). A theory of justice is a very detailed account of justice which includes the principles to govern a society and/or a list of capabilities to be promoted as public goal as well as weights assigned to each principle and/or capability and its distribution to each section of the population. A theoretical framework of justice is a less detailed account of justice which contains some incompleteness regarding the principles and/or capabilities to be promoted, their weight and distribution. Under these definitions, what the thesis intends to develop is another theoretical framework. However, to avoid confusion with Sen's theoretical framework of justice, the thesis uses the term of 'a theoretical *model* for reducing injustice'. I chose the term 'model' as it intends to be portable as presented at the ends of Chapters 2 and 7, and to be capable of being applied in practice by those fighting against injustice.

question of ***how can injustice be reduced in practice?*** With this navigational question at hand, the thesis engages in two-fold methodology to develop the model: (1) specification of what constitute justice and ways to promote it through philosophical discussion by reviewing the literature on theories of justice, and (2) empirical explorations to apply the model (which was developed through philosophical discussion) to real-world contexts so as to gain empirical feedback on it.

This two-fold methodology is sound because it tightly fits with the three layers necessary for normative social justice research (Robeyns, 2008, p. 343): (1) ideal theory, (2) non-ideal theory and (3) action design and implementation. According to Robeyns, while an ideal theory usefully shows an ultimate goal toward which a society should develop, it is just a part of the chain which causes emancipatory changes on the ground (ibid). It needs to be complemented by non-ideal theories which enable us 'to make comparisons between different social states and evaluate which one is more just than the other' and 'to guide our actions in order to move closer towards the ideal of the society' (ibid). Robeyns further points out that the gap between theoretical work and empirical contexts needs to be bridged at the final layer of action design and implementation (ibid). In this empirical layer, it is critical to make the theoretical proposition a joint project with those in the empirical context. For this, it is necessary to know their perspectives on the kinds of lives and goals that they value and involve them as active agents who act for promoting justice.

In order to produce the theoretical model, in the first place, the thesis engages in philosophical discussion on ***how injustice can be reduced in practice***. In so doing, the thesis keeps in mind the three layers (ideal, non-ideal, and action design and implementation) and takes an approach to identify three indispensable building blocks to comprise the model. Firstly, considering the importance for theorisation of justice to provide guidance as to what constitute justice and injustice, the thesis identifies (1) *a normative criterion* by which claims for justice are assessed in the model. Secondly, the thesis identifies (2) *a procedure to move a situation towards one which better fulfils the normative criterion*. Thirdly, (3) *a more grounded strategy in practice to actualise the efficacy of the procedure to promote justice* is necessary. By having this third building block, the model will be able to minimise remaining idealisations in (2) *the procedure to move a situation towards the one which better fulfils the normative criterion*. All the three building blocks are indispensable for the model to give a clear account of justice and how it could be promoted in practice while bringing its theoretical arguments down to the ground. The model developed through the philosophical discussion will be directly applicable to real-world contexts where people are fighting against injustice.

In the second place, empirical explorations are necessary to further develop the model so as to render it useful as a practical guide to promote justice. Given the highly complex nature of social reality, the model – which was developed by purely

theoretical discussion – needs to be applied in practice and any findings from the empirical explorations should inform its further development. Otherwise, the gap between theory and practice remains unbridged, which would leave the model with little practical implications. The empirical explorations are also necessary because without knowing the perspective and experiences of those actually fighting for justice, ways to support them would never be adequately understood.

Even in the methodology of empirical explorations, the navigational question of ***how injustice can be reduced in practice*** plays a role of informing the approach to advance the explorations. Firstly, the model is applied to real-world contexts where justice-promoting struggles are taking place. Secondly, whether injustice is actually reduced as theorised in the model is to be examined. Thirdly, any gap between the theoretical model and what is going on in the empirical contexts will be discussed and incorporated into the model so as to develop it further. Finally, the revised version of the theoretical model will be presented and it is supposed to serve as a practical guide to promote justice on the ground.

While there is always a limit of generalising empirical findings from specific contexts to inform a theoretical model, it is obviously important to gain feedback from as many as empirical contexts as possible. That said, it may not be possible to carry out multiple empirical studies, launching a series of fieldwork to listen to the voices of those involved in justice-promoting struggles at multiple geographical locations. Thus, for the empirical explorations, the thesis, firstly, uses secondary studies carried out in Egypt and India by other social scientists. This first part of the empirical exploration aims to apply the model to the contexts where justice-promoting struggles are taking place so as to examine how its theoretical propositions hold up in practice. Secondly, the thesis carries out a primary study by conducting fieldwork in West Bengal, India. It focuses on collecting in-depth data on a justice-promoting struggle in the context by the means of interviewing those involved in it. By talking with those involved, data is collected to elucidate what other factors (than theoretically specified ones) are critical for their struggle. In analysing the data, the thesis utilises the findings from the secondary studies to determine its focal points and proposes ways to support those involved in justice-promoting struggles. Such exercise of bringing findings from the empirical exploration up toward abstraction so as to incorporate them into the model is expected to pose a challenge. This is due to the potential gap between the everyday language used by people on the ground and the theoretical one used in the literature on justice theories. Thus, the thesis will make the process of the translation transparent, showing the readers areas of underlying commonality and incommensurability between the two languages.

### 4. Structure of the thesis

Following this introduction, Chapter 2 embarks on philosophical discussion so as

to develop a theoretical model. It identifies three indispensable building blocks to comprise the model: (1) a normative criterion, (2) a procedure to promote justice, and (3) a more grounded strategy in practice to actualise the practical efficacy of the procedure.

The philosophical discussion of Chapter 2 starts with singling out (2) a procedure to promote justice: i.e., Sen's theoretical framework of justice. The discussion of Chapter 2 proceeds to lay out core propositions of Sen's theoretical framework and highlights its strengths both on theoretical and practical grounds. Chapter 2, then, discusses three limits in Sen's theoretical framework. The discussion points out that in order to develop a robust theoretical model, it is necessary to augment Sen's theoretical framework with (1) a normative criterion and (3) a more grounded strategy in practice to actualise the efficacy of Sen's framework. Chapter 2 concludes with presenting a theoretical model for reducing injustice which not only theoretically shows a potential path to promote justice, but also is applicable to real-world contexts where justice-promoting struggles are taking place.

Having developed the theoretical model through the philosophical discussion, the thesis next embarks on the first part of the empirical exploration. As discussed above, for this exploration, it uses other scholars' empirical studies in Egypt and India. Chapter 3 starts with describing the two empirical contexts where justice-promoting struggles are taking place and examines the dynamics of the struggles. Chapter 3 proceeds to apply the model to the two empirical contexts, examining whether injustice is actually reduced as theorised in the model and analyses the gap between the theoretical arguments in the model and social reality on the ground. It concludes with presenting key findings from the exploration that the struggles involve several organisations and people who interact with each other in a highly dynamic manner.

Chapter 4 lays out the context and methods of my primary study in rural West Bengal, India. For this primary study, I carried out fieldwork for the two periods of time, for a month from the end of November 2016 to the end of December 2016, and for two months from the beginning of December 2017 to the end of January 2018. Chapter 4 starts with describing the context where the fieldwork took place, focusing on its demographic characteristics and political background. Chapter 4 then presents the methods used to collect and analyse the data. The chapter concludes with discussing the limitations of the methods used in the fieldwork as well as analysing the data.

In Chapters 5 and 6, the thesis embarks on the second part of the empirical exploration. These chapters aim to gain an in-depth understanding of a justice-promoting struggle in West Bengal by drawing on the findings from Chapter 3 as well as the fieldwork data. As such, Chapter 5 places its focus on exploring the complexity of the movement, illuminating who have been involved in it and how. It brings to light the dynamic and complex nature of the movement, and how it

involves diverse kinds of people and organisations.

Chapter 6 explores dynamics within the movement as it developed. Utilising the concept of agency, Chapter 6 analyses how the so-called ordinary people came together, forming a trans-individual force. It shows that as the movement emerges and evolves, agency of those involved in it also develops through their interaction with others within the movement as well as outside of it.

The concluding Chapter 7 retraces the steps that the thesis takes to develop the theoretical model. The discussion of Chapter 7 confirms the robustness of the model developed in Chapter 2 while pointing to the necessity to develop it further in the light of the key findings from the empirical explorations of Chapters 3, 5 and 6. Therein, a revised, further developed version of the model is presented. The chapter concludes with proposing ways to actually reduce injustice by supporting justice-promoting struggles on the ground.

## Chapter 2 A theoretical model for reducing injustice

### 1. Introduction

This chapter embarks on philosophical discussion to develop a theoretical model for reducing injustice. As discussed in Chapter 1, the model consists of the three building blocks: 1) a normative criterion, 2) a procedure to promote justice, and 3) a more grounded strategy in practice to actualise the efficacy of the procedure. In this chapter, I begin the discussion by setting out the central part of the model, a procedure to promote justice. I argue that Sen's theoretical framework of justice (2006, 2009) is the best fit for this building block.

Sen's theoretical framework is highly pragmatic and offers an important alternative to ideal theories of justice which have dominated political philosophy since Rawls's publication of *A Theory of Justice* (1971) (Deneulin, 2010; Osmani, 2010; Deneulin, 2011; Freeman, 2012; Gaus, 2012; Kelly, 2012; Oberdiek, 2012; Richardson, 2012; Satz, 2012; Vazquez, 2016). In developing his pragmatic framework, Sen (2009, p.5, emphasis original) points out that historically there are two approaches to theorising justice: *transcendental institutionalism* and *realisation-focused comparison*. The former is exemplified by the work of Rawls and focuses on identifying 'perfect justice' and 'concentrates on getting the institution right' (Sen, 2009, p.6). The latter is exemplified by the work of a social choice theorist Marquis de Condorset. It focuses on 'comparisons of society that already existed or could feasibly emerge' and 'the actual behaviour of people, rather than presuming compliance by all with ideal behaviour' (Sen, 2009 p.7).

Criticising the current state of political philosophy, Sen develops his theoretical framework by taking a *realisation-focused comparison* approach and building on his social choice work (Sen, 2009, pp. 87-113; 2017, p.426). This enables us to make comparisons between different social states and evaluate which is more just than the other. It has been highly influential, both within the capability approach literature and beyond, reorienting theories of justice from ideal to practice (Ypi, 2011; Drydyk and Wanate, 2016; Owen, 2016; Vazquez, 2016; Robeyns, 2017; Comim, Fennell and Anand, 2018; Floyd, 2019).

In this chapter, firstly, I lay out the key characteristics of Sen's theoretical framework of justice. This is followed by discussion of its strengths as a procedure to promote justice. I then go on to discuss two limitations, pointing out the necessity to augment it with a normative criterion and a more grounded strategy. The chapter proceeds to identify concepts and theories appropriate for the normative criterion and more grounded strategy. It concludes with presenting a theoretical model which not only theoretically shows a potential path to promote justice but also is directly applicable to real-world contexts.

### 2. Sen's theoretical framework of justice

## 2.1 Key characteristics of Sen's theoretical framework of justice

The first characteristic of Sen's framework of justice is its adoption of the 'capability perspective' – i.e., 'human lives and the freedoms that the persons can respectively exercise' – in the assessment of justice (Sen, 2009, p. xi, note 1). [5] For Sen, many theorists of justice take the *transcendental institutionalist* approach, overwhelmingly concentrating on how to establish just institutions in their accounts of justice (Sen, 2006, 2009). Sen problematises this focus because as long as institutional arrangements are just, serious deprivation and oppression, which are caused by people's actual behaviour coupled with social factors, remain uncriticised (ibid). Sen argues that 'capability perspective' aptly reflects the importance of both institutional arrangements and people's behaviour, and thus is suitable for the assessment of justice.

The second characteristic of Sen's theoretical framework of justice is its acknowledgement of evaluative incompleteness (Sen, 2009, pp.87-113). Evaluative incompleteness rejects a 'totalist form' which tries to make the ranking of 'every political and social arrangement in comparison with every other arrangement' (Sen, 2009, p.103). Drawing on his *Collective Choice and Social Welfare* (1970), Sen argues that people can arrive at a partial agreement by recognising evidently problematic situations (ibid). Sen (2009) underscores the advantage of this evaluative incompleteness by pointing out that in real-world contexts, people often put forward equally reasonable yet conflicting claims of justice. In such cases, people cannot decide on which claim deserves public support (ibid). Sen illustrates this reality by using an example of three children who demand the right to possess a flute: the first child makes their claim based on efficiency, the second raises a claim on the ground of appreciation of their own labour, and the last child demands the flute with reference to equality (Sen, 2009, pp.12-15). Sen advocates for leaving such incommensurable claims for justice aside, and instead focusing on tackling evidently problematic situations such as extreme poverty, famines, and violence against women as the manifestation of injustice.

The third characteristic of Sen's theoretical framework of justice is its acceptance of plural reasons in arriving at a verdict on claims for justice (Sen, 2009, 2012). Sen's framework admits that people often agree to remove injustice based on plural or different reasons, and regards this as acceptable (Sen, 2009, pp.394-395). For instance, some might object to social discrimination based on the principle of human rights, and others might make a case against the discrimination with reference to the impact on the society's economy. The important thing is, Sen argues, that notwithstanding these plural reasons provided, people problematise the discrimination and get ready to find effective means to remedy it.

The fourth characteristic of Sen's theoretical framework of justice is the central

[5] By 'capability perspective', Sen refers to 'the capability approach' which Sen developed over the past decades (Sen, 1985, 1992a, 1999).

role that people's exercise of practical reason plays in identifying injustice. Sen explicitly states that he draws on an 'essentially Rawlsian' concept of public reasoning as 'a good conceptual base' for his framework to make comparative assessment of states of affairs (Sen, 2006, p.228). As such, he terms people's exercise of 'practical reason behind what is to be chosen and which decisions should be taken' public reasoning (Sen, 2009, p.106).

It should be noted that the Rawlsian concept of public reasoning in its original form is highly idealistic because public reasoning takes place 'within a framework of what he or she sincerely regards as the most reasonable political conception of justice, a conception that expresses political values that others, as free and equal citizens, might reasonably be expected reasonably to endorse' (Rawls, 1997, p.773). It is also restrictive as it applies only to 'political discussions of constitutional essentials and matters of basic justice' and 'in public political forums' such as discourses of judges, government officials and political candidates (Rawls, 1997, pp.767-768).

Sen develops this ideal Rawlsian concept into a pragmatic one which may deliver 'rankings of alternatives that can be realized' (Sen, 2009, p.17). Thus, Sen's pragmatic concept of public reasoning refers to 'a valued ability of a group of people – to speak to each other, to discuss pros and cons, to scrutinise together' (Sen, 2012 p.334). Sen's is not restrictive but all-encompassing because it is 'reasoning and discussion through media, public meetings, conversations with others on relevant subjects and even demonstrations' (Drèze and Sen, 2014, p. 259).

Sen points out that historically most conspicuous injustices such as slavery, famine and severe discrimination against certain groups of people, have been reduced through public reasoning (Sen, 2009). Nevertheless, he also admits that public reasoning does not always work in this way and develops another set of important concepts to address this concern in his theoretical framework. As such, the fifth characteristic of Sen's theoretical framework of justice is the distinction between closed and open impartiality and the use of the latter for the proper working of public reasoning. Closed impartiality refers to 'the procedure of making impartial judgements (which) invokes only the members of a given society or nation for whom judgements are being made' (Sen, 2009, p.123). Its prominent example is Rawls's 'justice as fairness' and his conceptual device of an original position in which a social contract is made among the citizens of a given political community without involving any outsiders (ibid). On the other hand, open impartiality refers to 'the procedure of impartial assessments (which) can, and in some cases, must, invoke judgements, among others, from outside the focal group, to avoid parochial bias' (ibid). To further elaborate on open impartiality, Sen (2006, p.233) draws on Adam Smith's concept of impartial spectators who are 'imagined, disinterested observers for comparative assessments'. Sen theorises that using impartial spectators as a reasoning device will help us 'remove ourselves…from our natural

station and endeavour to view (our circumstances) at a certain distance from us…with the eye of other people, or as other people are likely to view them' (Sen, 2009, pp.125-126). An exemplary person who engaged in public reasoning with open impartiality, using impartial spectators is the British activist Mary Wollstonecraft. She supported the French Revolution and defended the rights of both men and women including those enslaved in the US in the 1860s at the time of the American Revolution when a vast majority of people regarded such a reasoning as too unconventional (Sen, 2009, pp.114-116 and p.161). Sen's framework thus uses the notions of open impartiality and impartial spectators to enable people in public reasoning to judge 'whether some appearance of justice is socially biased through the impact of entrenched tradition and local custom' (2006, p.233), and identify injustice.

The sixth characteristic of Sen's theoretical framework is the distinction between culmination outcomes and comprehensive outcomes and its adoption of both in thinking about matters of justice. Culmination outcomes refer to 'the simple outcomes seen in a way that is detached from processes, agencies and relations' (Sen, 2009, p. 215).[6] Comprehensive outcomes, on the other hand, 'include actions undertaken, agencies involved, processes used, etc.' (ibid). For instance, 'if a presidential candidate in an election were to argue that what is really important for him or her is not just to win the forthcoming election, but 'to win the election fairly', then the outcome sought must be seen as a compressive outcome', rather than a culmination outcome (Sen, 2009, p.23). Sen draws attention to the fact that a *realisation-focused comparison* approach may concentrate solely on culmination outcomes but his framework adopts both. For Sen, therefore, not only the outcome of public reasoning but also the process through which a society reaches that outcome matters.

### 2.2 Advantages of Sen's theoretical framework of justice

Having laid out the key characteristics of Sen's theoretical framework of justice, I now discuss the strengths of his framework, focusing on why it serves as a robust building block of the procedure to promote justice for the model.

#### 2.2.1 Open-endedness: Sen provides us with parts rather than the whole

Sen's theoretical framework of justice is, in fact, viewed as an incomplete ethical theory in the light of tradition in political philosophy (Freeman, 2012; Qizilbash, 2016). This view is justifiable because Sen's does not determine either a list of capabilities valuable for a society, or weights assigned to each item in the list or its distribution to each section of the population in the society (ibid). In making his framework of justice open-ended, Sen (2012, p.333) argues that 'the specifications

[6] In the capability approach literature, agency is generally understood as 'the ability to pursue goals that one values and has reason to value' (Alkire and Deneulin, 2009, p.31).

(of a list of capabilities to be promoted as public goal), in the context of a theory of justice, cannot be set independently of the process of public reasoning'.

Qizilbash (2016) argues that Sen developed the open-ended framework in order to challenge dominant ways of thinking of the time. That is, with his theoretical framework of justice, he challenged transcendental institutionalism, and with his capability approach, he challenged utilitarian reasoning. Qizilbash further points out that in advancing these open-ended frameworks, Sen allows people with otherwise very different perspectives to endorse some of his views, opening up the possibility for them to build on his frameworks. In the case of the capability approach, this great strength resulted in a new body of literature. Similarly, unlike other transcendental institutional theories of justice (e.g., Dworkin, 2000; Nozic, 2001), the open-endedness of Sen's framework of justice will allow other theorists – including myself – to develop his framework further into their own.[7]

### 2.2.2 Centrality of public reasoning

The centrality of public reasoning in Sen's theoretical framework of justice is another strength. Theoretically, this feature allows his framework to accommodate the matter of self-determination – i.e., it is for the people who would be directly affected by the policies in society to decide on public goals and appropriate means to advance the goals. Sen (1990, 2006, 2009, 2012) repeatedly argues that freedom in the process matters as much as the outcome, and that the process of people engaging in public reasoning itself has intrinsic value (ibid). This is in line with the view of many philosophers that self-determination is one of the key components of the idea of justice (Young, 1990; Habermas, 1996; Fraser, 2008; Pereira, 2013).

The centrality of public reasoning also has a practical strength. This feature can be contrasted to theorists' contemplation approach to standards of justice, exemplified by Martha Nussbaum's list of central human capabilities to be promoted by the government (Nussbaum, 2000, 2006)[8]. A critical drawback of the latter approach is that not everyone would agree with the validity of the proposed standard of justice, which is evident from the debate on Nussbaum's lists (Alkire, 2002; Sen, 2004; Robeyns, 2005; Crocker, 2008; Qizilbash, 2016; Robeyns, 2016). A related drawback comes up when these standards of justice are to be applied to real-world contexts. When people – both ordinary people and politicians – are not convinced by the value of the standards of justice formulated by theorists, people will not behave in support of them (Robeyns, 2008). In the light of the deadlock these theories of justice would face, Sen's theoretical framework of justice keeps

[7] For instance, Vazquez (2016) advanced a theoretical framework by combining Sen's theoretical framework of justice with Rawls's ideal principles of justice.

[8] While Nussbaum is clear about her intention to advance a (partial) ideal theory, she puts 'I consider the list as open-ended and subject to revision and rethinking in the way that any society's account of its most fundamental entitlements is always subject to supplementation (and deletion)' (Nussbaum, 2006, p78).

open the space for dialogue on the standards of justice (Gaus, 2012, 2016). While the road to a partial agreement on public political questions might be tough, it still preserves the potential to serve a procedure to reduce injustice on the ground. This strength makes Sen's framework the suitable procedure-part building block for the theoretical model of this thesis.

### 2.3 Limits of Sen's theoretical framework of justice

Having highlighted the strengths of Sen's framework, I now discuss its limits. In the first place, it neither has a list of capabilities to be promoted as a public goal nor a normative criterion by which the extent of justice may be evaluated. In the second place, despite its advance towards pragmatism, there remain some idealisations in his concept of public reasoning. In the third place, his concept of public reasoning is over-individualised. I start the discussion of these limits by examining cases in which the lack of a normative criterion in his framework becomes problematic. I then proceed to draw attention to the gap between the actual public reasoning and Sen's concept in which some idealisations remain. This is followed by the discussion on the necessity to go beyond his over-individualised concept of public reasoning in accounting for injustice-reducing changes. In so doing, I examine how these limits undermine the expected efficacy of Sen's theoretical framework as the procedure to reduce injustice in practice.

#### 2.3.1 Lack of a normative criterion

Sen's theoretical framework of justice is criticised for being too underspecified to serve as a normative guide to help one make value judgements about the matters of justice (Deneulin, 2010, 2011; Valentini, 2011; Freeman, 2012; Satz, 2012; Drydyk, 2016; Qizilbash, 2016; Vazquez, 2016; Robeyns, 2017). As mentioned above, Sen (2012, p.333) justifies his stand by arguing that not theorists but public reasoning will and ought to take up the task of specifying important matters of justice such as which capabilities matter. Thus, he refuses even to propose any normative criterion by which an extent of justice may be assessed (ibid). While overall the openness of Sen's framework is a strength, the lack of a normative criterion can also be seen as a limit if his framework intends to 'serve as the basis of practical reasoning of…how to reduce injustice' (Sen, 2009, p.xi) because it provides no basis on which disputes over what constitutes injustice may be resolved.

Social reality is often muddled with egregious injustices and people have different normative views on them. Thus, the identification of injustice may become far more difficult than Sen assumes (Robeyns, 2017; Satz, 2012; Vazquez, 2016). For instance, should people regard any form of child labour as the manifestation of injustice and take public action to abolish it immediately? (Satz, 2012). Or should people identify prostitution in the context where human trafficking is prevalent as injustice and combat the practice of prostitution across the board (Bandyopadhyaya

et al., 2008)? In the face of this, Sen's proposal to leave incommensurable claims for justice aside and focus on tackling most egregious injustices may lead people not to be able to identify injustice at all.

If a theoretical framework intends to serve as a practical guide for those wishing to promote justice, it should also help them make judgements about what constitutes injustice, even while recognising that its empirical application will differ from case to case. A normative criterion is therefore required, by which claims for justice may be assessed and which provides guidance as to what counts as a more or less just states of affairs .

### 2.3.2 Idealisations remaining in Sen's concept of public reasoning

The second limit is that despite the pragmatic basis of his theoretical framework, there still remain idealisations related to Sen's concept of public reasoning. Idealisations – i.e., idealised assumptions, which make social reality appear in a significantly *simpler* and *better* way than it actually is (Valentini, 2009, p.332) – are inherent in all theories and theoretical frameworks of justice. Therein, social reality needs to be presented in a *simpler* way so as to 'capture key elements, which are obscured when we consider the problem in all its complexity' (Gaus, 2016, p.xvii) and in a *better* way so as not to be 'excessively conservative' but 'to function as a critical tool for social change' (Miller, 2007, pp.18-19). In the following section, I critically examine how remaining idealisations in Sen's concept of public reasoning leave gaps between his theoretical framework and the actual operation of public reasoning.

*A. Actual people in reality vs. idealised people in Sen's theoretical framework of justice*

First of all, people in practice do not exercise public reason with open impartiality or imagine 'impartial spectators' to distance themselves from their beliefs and assumptions. Instead, people often promote comprehensive doctrines which are informed by their religious and cultural values (Freeman, 2012; Pereira, 2012). They also pursue self-interested claims without contemplating what we owe to each other in a society (Vazquez, 2016; Satz, 2012). Vazquez (2016), for instance, points out that in Mexico, there are people who see the capability for employers to make employees work in exploitative conditions for their greater economic gain reasonable and valuable (ibid). Even though such a reasoning can be transformed if these people use open impartiality and impartial spectators, they simply do not do so. Consequently, their biased reasoning has contributed to the recent labour reform in favour of the employers, leaving thousands of people in poverty (ibid).

Secondly, people's discursive authority varies in practice. Even the same claim receives very different attention and response from others, depending on who makes

the claim because of their social standing (Kelly, 2012; Deneulin, 2014; Drèze and Sen, 2014; Sen, 2015; Vazquez, 2016). In his later empirical work on India, Sen himself repeatedly draws attention to the fact that even though people from underprivileged backgrounds make important claims for justice, their voices remain ignored or trivialised due to entrenched practices of social exclusion (Drèze and Sen, 2014; 2015).

Thirdly, others' perception influences how people behave and what people conceive of as valuable in actual public reasoning (Pereira, 2013). This point is epitomised by the phenomenon of 'conformist behaviour'. Conformist behaviour operates as a kind of vicious circle. Being concerned about what others think about us, we follow the conventional view. This occurs especially where there is insufficient information available about alternatives. Our following of the conventions in turn inhibits the search for relevant information to determine which course of action might be best (Pereira, 2013). The result is uniform arguments without any dissent in the actual public reasoning. Even though the proposed arguments may be unreasonable once they are critically scrutinised by those who are not influenced by social conformity, people simply support arguments in accordance with the conventional view. While Sen (2009, p.338-354; Drèze and Sen, 2014, p.243-277; Sen, 2017, pp. 395-408) assumes that public reasoning involves a wide range of arguments, including radical dissent, this does not always hold true in practice.

*B. Exclusion of certain people from public reasoning vs. idealised level of inclusion in Sen's theoretical framework of justice*

In Sen's theoretical framework of justice, Sen does not explicitly state whether a wide range of people are fully included in public reasoning.[9] In his theoretical framework (2006, 2009), Sen cites the injustice-reducing operation of public reasoning such as the prevention of famine and elaborates on his unique concept of public reasoning which encompasses both casting ballots and taking part in public discussion. Thus, his theoretical framework strikes one as if the majority of people have a say in organising the basic structure of society by means of casting ballots, taking part in public discussion, influencing government's enacting and executing public policies.

However, very importantly, a large number of people are excluded from public reasoning in practice (Fraser, 1990; Bohman, 1996, 1997; Fraser and Honneth, 2003; Kelly, 2012; Pereira, 2013). In the case of the US, despite the greater political inclusion achieved through the Voting Rights Act of 1965, the inclusion of African

[9] The broad concept of comprehensive outcome suggests that both the process and outcome of public reasoning matters (See Section 2.1). However, it is difficult to take this concept as equivalent to the advocacy for full inclusion of people in public reasoning.

Americans in public reasoning is threatened by other channels of political exclusion due to the growing inequality across the racial divide. One such channel is incarceration of African Americans, especially for non-violence drug offenses, at a striking rate (Kelly, 2012). Another channel is the introduction of restricting voting laws in many US states which require strict ID presentation, and the resultant depressed voter turnout, in particular, among less educated and lower income African Americans (Combs, 2016).

The exclusion is in contrast to the dominance of powerful people in public reasoning and their dissemination of discourses in favour of their interests through media. This is exemplified by the 'blame the poor' rhetoric – i.e., poor people are taking advantage of and draining public funds such that society should promote their self-responsibility by withdrawing public support from them (Smiley and West, 2012). Such a dominant discourse results in further excluding already marginalised people from public reasoning by putting them into more severe deprivation both in material and social terms and delegitimising their voice. Consequently, these marginalised people face additional difficulties in their taking part in public reasoning.

In addition, a large number of people do not have 'political functioning', making their presence in public reasoning nominal (Bohman, 1996, 1997). The critical theorist and deliberative democracy theorist Bohman (1996, 1997) conceptualises 'political functioning' as persuasive discussion capacity, capacities of framing and reframing a debate, and strong reasoning capacity to deal with conflicting views. Bohman theorises that even when people without this 'political functioning' take part in public reasoning, they would be unable to influence its outcome because they cannot make a strong case in favour of their interests and goals (ibid). Thus, Bohman emphasises the necessity to truly include those materially and socially disadvantaged by aiding them to develop their 'political functioning' in addition to safeguarding their formal and physical presence (ibid).

While the exclusion of a large number of people from public reasoning is a serious reality, Sen's theoretical framework of justice neither explicitly acknowledges it nor has a strategy to address it. Thus, directly applying Sen's theoretical framework to empirical contexts as a practical guide to reduce injustice becomes difficult.

### 2.3.3 Over-individualised concept of public reasoning

The other limit of Sen's theoretical framework of justice is that Sen conceptualises public reasoning in an over-individualised way. This follows the individualism implicit within his capability approach (Gore, 1997; Evans, 2002; Stewart and Deneulin, 2002; Stewart, 2005; Kelly, 2012; Pelenc, Bazile and Ceruti, 2015; Platzky Miller, 2018; Nebel and Nebel, 2018; Sharif, 2018; Souza and Goldmeier,

2018; Warner, 2018).[10]Sen's concept of public reasoning focuses on each person's impartial reasoning as the example of Mary Wollstonecraft shows (Sen, 2010, pp. 114-116 and p. 161). This focus is further reflected in his proposition of 'impartial spectators' as a reasoning device for one to negotiate biased, parochial reasoning (Sen, 2006, 2010).

While Sen's focus captures an important dimension of public reasoning, this alone is not sufficient. Thus, I propose to reconceptualise public reasoning so as to fully reflect its multi-dimensionality. In the first place, people's exercise of public reason often takes the form of collective actions (Evans, 2002; Kelly, 2012; Pereira, 2013; Sharif, 2018). Kelly (2012, p.302) presents two empirical examples of public reasoning which contributed to the promotion of justice: the international human rights movement and the pro-same-sex marriage campaign in the US. Drawing attention to the fact that neither movement could materialise unless individuals come and act together, Kelly proposes to understand public reasoning as a 'collective capability'.

Kelly's proposal (2012) triggered an important response from Sen (2012, p.334). Sen declined Kelly's proposal because this might end up reducing public reasoning's 'far-reaching and diverse relevance' to the concept of 'collective capability' which simply represents one dimension of public reasoning (ibid). Sen further stated that 'public reason spans multiple agents, individual and collective', and for public reasoning to contribute to justice-promoting changes, 'individual capabilities in an interactive form' is necessary (ibid).

In his later empirical work (Drèze and Sen, 2014), Sen became more explicit in articulating the importance of both the collective and individual dimensions of public reasoning and the dynamic interaction between them. For instance, Sen (Drèze and Sen, 2014, p.260) explained the process of the advancement of women's rights through public reasoning as follows: on the one hand, John Stuart Mill's publication of *The Subjection of Women* in 1869 became an important contribution to public reasoning on the rights of women; and on the other hand, suffragists movements in the early decade in the 20$^{th}$ century in England amid social conservatives' opposition, substantially contributed to moving the public reasoning toward the promotion of women's rights.

In the second place, people's exercise of public reason has the inter-subjective dimension. Challenging solipsistic, individualistic views of public reasoning, the critical theorist Gustavo Pereira (2013) lays out an inter-subjective understanding of public reasoning about which even Sen's later work (Drèze and Sen, 2014; Sen, 2016) remains silent. Influenced by Hegel's philosophy and Mead's social

[10] Thus far, many capability approach scholars have criticised Sen's capability approach as being individualistic. While many of them do not directly discuss Sen's concept of public reasoning (2006, 2009), these scholars' illuminating critique lays a basis for the discussion in this section.

psychology, Pereira (2013, p.178) theorises that public reasoning is 'processes in which (persons') preferences, values and beliefs come into play in a dialogue with others, dialogues in which one's positions can be modified, adjusted or even abandoned'. Pereira (2013) further argues that public reasoning is permeated with conflicts and struggles where social movements can play an emancipatory role in bringing activists' and other people's worldviews into dialogues.

In the third place, people's exercise of public reason is inextricable from their emotions toward each other, and thus the emotional dimension of public reasoning is very important. By conceptualising public reasoning with the predominant focus on impartiality, Sen (2010) pays very little attention to people's emotions. While acknowledging that 'a sense of justice could serve as a signal that moves us', Sen (2010, p. viii) concludes that such an emotion 'demands critical examination'. Sen's stand is in contrast with Nussbaum (2001, 2006, 2013) who has extensively theorised that justice promotion necessitates people's having critical emotions towards other people. In her recent work, Nussbaum (2013) has strongly argued that for the proper operation of public reasoning, people's critical emotions such as sympathy and compassion need to be cultivated while harmful ones such as disgust and envy need to be discouraged (ibid). Furthermore, building on Nussbaum, Gasper and Comim (2019a) recently brought to light the importance of emotions in public reasoning. Examining the empirical case of India, they underscored that successful public goods provision, operation and maintenance rest on a decent degree of the critical emotions among fellow citizens (ibid). In the face of these findings, Sen's concept of public reasoning which does not fully accommodate its emotional dimension stops short of accounting important ways to reduce injustice in practice.

### 2.4 Sen and beyond

The discussion thus far underscored that Sen's theoretical framework of justice is well suited for the procedure to promote justice for the theoretical model of this thesis. It has strengths of being pragmatic and open-ended as well as placing public reasoning at its centre. Despite these great strengths, the discussion also drew attention to three limits in Sen's theoretical framework: it does not have a normative criterion by which the extent of justice may be assessed; despite its pragmatism, there still remain idealisations related to his concept of public reasoning; and it conceptualises public reasoning in an over-individualised way. These limits severely undermine the efficacy of Sen's theoretical framework of justice as a procedure to promote justice in practice.

In order to develop a theoretical model for this thesis, I argue that Sen's theoretical framework needs to be augmented by two additional building blocks: *a normative criterion* and *a more grounded strategy in practice to actualise the practical efficacy of his framework*. As the first step, I augment Sen's theoretical

framework with a normative criterion. There are three standards for the normative criterion to preserve the strengths of the centrality of public reasoning in Sen's framework while addressing the limits.

Firstly, while serving as a normative guide, the normative criterion for the model should not be a specification of an entirely just society. Rather, it should work as the broad normative criterion which will make the model help decide on competing claims for justice and judge what counts as a more or less just state of affairs.

Secondly, taking Sen's concept of comprehensive outcome into serious account, the normative criterion should concern process as well as outcome. Thus, if some groups lack 'political functioning' (Bohman, 1996, 1997) and are excluded from public reasoning, the normative criterion should identify this as unjust. Consequently, the model augmented by the normative criterion should explicitly direct society towards a socially inclusive approach to public reasoning. This is also an important move to address the limit in Sen's theoretical framework that people cannot consensually identify injustice in the face of social reality muddled with problematic situations. This is because the voices of those previously excluded and marginalised may well break many of such deadlocks.

Thirdly, the normative criterion should be applicable to a variety of empirical contexts while preserving the normative guiding force to decide on competing claims for justice. It also should be accessible to people who actually engage in public reasoning on the ground.

I argue that the concept of equal dignity well meets these three standards, aptly augments Sen's theoretical framework of justice and thus should become the normative criterion for the model of this thesis. In the next section, I will expand on the rationale for singling out this concept as the normative criterion.

## 3. Equal dignity as the normative criterion

### 3.1 What is equal dignity?

According to Immanuel Kant (2004, 2012), each person should be treated as an end by her/himself and never only as a means for some other ends, because each person has intrinsic worth – and this intrinsic worth is what Kant called *dignity*. Kant further established that if each person is an end in her/himself, rather than a means to someone else's ends, all persons are entitled to *equal dignity* (ibid).

This broad yet normatively powerful concept of equal dignity has played a critical role as the ultimate value and goal both in theory and practice. On the one hand, the concept of equal dignity has been playing an architectural role in contemporary theorisation of justice. Over the past decades, many philosophers have invoked equal dignity as the ultimate value and developed their theories of justice based on it (For example, Young 1990, 2000; Honneth, 1995; Nussbaum, 2000, 2006; Rawls, 1999; Dworkin, 2000; Fraser, 2008; Pereira, 2013; Anderson and Honneth, 2005). Despite their disagreement on how it should be specified, they

agree that the concept of equal dignity is central to the theorisation of justice. Robeyns (2017) thus characterises these theorists as theorists of egalitarian justice.

In addition to its theoretical prominence, the concept of equal dignity has had a significant impact on the practice of promoting emancipatory changes across the globe, often manifesting itself in the expression of human rights (Sayer, 2011). Its epitome is The Universal Declaration of Human Rights which starts with pronouncing that 'all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights – they are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood' (UN, 2015). With its strong normative statement, the declaration has invited many countries across the globe to enact progressive laws, contributing to promoting dignity of people (Sayer, 2011).

In addition, constitutions of many countries are underpinned by the concept of equal dignity (e.g., Prime Minister of Japan and His Cabinet, 1947; U.S. Government, 1971; Government of India, 2015). These constitutions have contributed to the establishment of progressive laws and policies conducive to emancipatory changes in practice.[11] Moreover, many social movements across the globe invoke the concept of equal dignity in order to promote their emancipatory goals – e.g., the struggle by 'Dalits (untouchables)' in India, the Land, Territory and Dignity Forum, Porto Alegre, Brazil, and the Unison trade union's Dignity at Work campaign in the UK, to name just a few (Sayer, 2011).

In order to demonstrate the suitability of the concept of equal dignity as the normative criterion, I, firstly, examine how this broad yet normatively powerful concept has been elaborated by key egalitarian theorists of justice. In so doing, I lay out their unique specifications of the concept, highlighting their differences. Secondly, building on the examination, I draw attention to similarities of their elaborations and illuminate key constituents of the concept. Thirdly, I discuss whether the concept is compatible with Sen's theoretical framework of justice which he intentionally keeps open-ended. Finally, I conclude the discussion by showing that the concept well meets the three criteria identified above, and so becomes a suitable normative criterion for the theoretical model of this thesis.

### 3.2 The concept of equal dignity re-examined

[11] For instance, the Japanese Constitution, Article 14 articulates that 'all of the people are equal under the law and there shall be no discrimination in political, economic or social relations because of race, creed, sex, social status or family origin. Peers and peerage shall not be recognised. No privilege shall accompany any award of honour, decoration or any distinction, nor shall any such award be valid beyond the lifetime of the individual who now holds or hereafter may receive it.' The presence of Article 14 has contributed to the creation of progressive laws and policies such as the Equal Employment Opportunity Law between Men and Women passed in May 1985. Similarly, Drèze and Sen (2014) point out that the very existence of the Indian Constitution has led to progressive laws and policies in India. These include Right to Information Act (2000) and National Employment Guarantee Act (2005).

This section examines how egalitarian theorists elaborate the concept of equal dignity how it underpins their theories of justice. In the light of the enormous number of egalitarian theorists, it is impossible to cover all the egalitarian theorists in this section. Their theories and accounts of justice also have developed and expanded across several bodies of literature. In addition, while egalitarian theorists build their accounts of justice under the influence of equal dignity, not all of them directly elaborate on the concept. Thus, I carry out the examination in a systematic way, focusing on three strands of egalitarian theorists, those who made influential theories of justice and who explicitly elaborate on the concept of equal dignity. I believe that this is a sensible approach for the following reasons.

Firstly, influential egalitarian theorists of justice have become so by convincing many people to endorse their normative accounts centred on the concept of equal dignity. Thus, attending to them will result in a compilation of cogent accounts of the concept. Secondly, it is important to examine the major strands of egalitarian theories of justice – namely, liberal political philosophy, Critical Theory, and the capability approach literature – and shed light on differences and similarities among egalitarian theorists' elaboration of the concept. As such, I focus on the following three theorists: (1) Martha Nussbaum who has made a significant impact on the liberal political philosophy and the capability approach literature, (2) Nancy Fraser and (3) Gustavo Pereira who have made a significant impact on Critical Theory. I begin the examination of the concept by attending to Martha Nussbaum's (partial) theory of justice.

**(1) Martha Nussbaum's elaboration of equal dignity**

Martha Nussbaum is one of the pioneers of the capability approach and has developed the most detailed capability theory of justice as yet (Nussbaum, 2000, 2006). As her (partial) theory of justice, Nussbaum proposed a list of central human capabilities which governments across the world should guarantee to all their citizens at least at the threshold level (2000, 2006).[12] Nussbaum argues that this list is cross-culturally applicable such that every human being on earth is entitled to these capabilities (ibid). Nussbaum (2000, 2006) justifies her stand by arguing that each of these capabilities is needed in order for a human life to be 'not so impoverished that it is not worthy of the dignity of a human being' (2000, p. 72).

Nussbaum (2000, 2006) explicitly states that her list of human capabilities is developed as a reflection on human dignity – which necessitates 'treating each as an end and not as a mere tool of the ends of others' (2006, p.70). For Nussbaum, human dignity is a very good starting point for theorising justice because the

[12] Nussbaum's theory of justice is commonly seen as a partial theory of justice because she does not answer the question of what social justice requires once those thresholds are met and how much of inequalities of capabilities above the threshold should be permitted (Robeyns, 2017).

concept has intuitive power: 'we react to the spectacle of humanity so assailed in a way very different from the way we react to a storm blowing grains of sand in the wind…for we see a human being as having worth as an end, a kind of awe-inspiring something that makes it horrible to see this person beaten down by currents of chance' (Nussbaum, 2000, pp.70-71). In addition, Nussbaum points out that human dignity has cross-cultural resonance as exemplified by many cultures' appreciating the empathetic power of tragic dramas (Nussbaum, 2000, p. 71) and growing global appeal of human rights approach which is founded on the concept of human dignity (Nussbaum, 2006, p.78).

I would like to draw attention to the fact that Nussbaum's (partial) theory of justice comprised by her list of central human capabilities is an attempt to 'give shape and content to the broad concept of equal dignity' (Nussbaum, 2006, p.75). Her elaboration of the concept of equal dignity has two characteristics. Firstly, in a Kantian vein, for Nussbaum, equal dignity is a person's intrinsic property. According to Nussbaum, a priori, there is something of intrinsic worth to human beings, irrespective of their social standing, characteristics and geographical location. Thus, every human being on earth is entitled to the central human capabilities specified in her list.

Secondly, another key characteristic of Nussbaum's elaboration of equal dignity is its multi-dimensionality (Nussbaum, 2006, pp. 76-77). It is not confined to mere legal rights such as 'the right of political participation, protections of free speech and association.' In Nussbaum's theory, in order for a person to live with dignity as a human, she/he should have the capability of 'practical reasoning' which necessitates adequate education as well as the capabilities of 'bodily integrity', 'bodily health', and 'affiliation' among others. Nussbaum's list suggests that for the multi-dimensional central human capabilities to be safeguarded, the impact of negative socio-cultural factors (i.e., discrimination on the basis of race, sex, sexual orientation, ethnicity, caste, religion, national origin) needs to be removed.

Nussbaum's list of central human capabilities has substantially contributed to the capability approach literature by developing the approach (which is a mere evaluative framework) into a partial theory of justice. Nevertheless, some theorists raise concerns about her proposition because such a well-defined and detailed list may leave insufficient scope for public reasoning and respect for people's self-determination in contexts culturally very different to Nussbaum's own (Sen, 2004; Robeyns, 2005; Crocker, 2008). Another concern pertains to the practical application of her list. Despite its well-defined elaboration, her list is still formulated at the abstract level. Thus, for her list to be translated into actual policies in each context, people in the context have to answer several key questions. These include how the abstractly described capabilities are understood in the context, who would design and implement the policies based on the understanding, which capabilities should be prioritised in the policy making and how disagreement on

these questions are to be addressed. Ultimately, even Nussbaum's elaboration of equal dignity necessitates public reasoning in its practical application.

**(2) Nancy Fraser's elaboration of equal dignity**

Nancy Fraser is one of the key theorists in contemporary Critical Theory, and has extensively written on social justice from a critical perspective (Fraser, 1990, 2003, 2005, 2008). Her critical enquiry into social justice culminated in her Tanner Lectures on Human Values 1996 'Social justice in the age of identity politics: Redistribution, recognition, and participation' (Fraser, 2003). Therein, Fraser proposes the bi-dimensional concept of justice 'participatory parity' which is an elaboration of the concept of equal dignity.

As a starting point of developing 'participatory parity', Fraser (2003) questions the widespread belief that the 'redistribution' paradigm and the 'recognition' paradigm are incompatible. On the one hand, the 'redistribution' paradigm comes from the liberal tradition, especially its late-twentieth-century Anglo American branch of liberal political philosophy. Philosophers from this tradition such as John Rawls (1999) and Ronald Dworkin (2000) theorise that justice requires equality of means among people and extensively discuss what this means. For example, resources such as income should be distributed to people so as to enable them to pursue their unique life goals (ibid)[13]. On the other hand, the 'recognition' paradigm, coming from Hegelian philosophy, particularly the phenomenology of consciousness, became influential in the 1990s (Young, 1990; Taylor, 1994; Honneth, 1995). [14] These 'recognition' theorists problematises the liberal proposition that equal distribution of means to promote each person's goal should be the central focus for advancing justice. In their view, such a proposition does not take difference among people into account. They, in particular, draw attention to the presence of disrespect and non-recognition against people with certain social standings based on, for example, gender, race and ethnicity. These 'recognition' theorists further argue that respecting a person with a marginalised social standing should not require her/his assimilation to dominant socio-cultural norms – rather, the person's difference should be appreciated as it is (ibid).

In the light of these differences, many theorists such as Richard Rorty, Brian Barry, Todd Gitlin, Iris Marion Young, come to argue that these two paradigms – 'redistribution' vs. 'recognition' – are the antithesis of one another (Fraser, 2003).

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[13] While acknowledging such general tendency in liberal political philosophy (Robeyns, 2003), Robeyns (2017, p.151), points out that not all 'redistributive' theorists subscribe to distribution of, strictly speaking, resources per se as the means. She states that 'in fact, plain equality of resources is a claim very few theorists of justice would be willing to defend' (ibid).

[14] In the tradition of phenomenology of consciousness, it is postulated that 'recognition designates an ideal reciprocal relation between subjects in which each sees the other as its equal and also as separate from it…one becomes a (proper) individual subject only in virtue of recognising, and being recognised by another subject' (Fraser, 2003 p. 10).

Nevertheless, examining 'folk paradigms of justice' (i.e., claims for justice made by social movements and political actors in practice), Fraser argues that the antithesis is false by raising two important points. Firstly, Fraser (2003, p.19) points out that there exist bi-dimensionally subordinated groups who suffer both maldistribution and misrecognition 'in forms where neither of these injustices is an indirect effect of the other, but where both are primary and co-original'. Fraser cites the example of gender injustice, a major feature of which is a recognition issue (ibid). For instance, due to androcentrism, traits associated with masculinity are highly valued in popular culture and everyday interaction, and a male-centred perspective is expressly codified in many areas of law (ibid). However, this way of seeing gender injustice explains only half of the issue as gender also structures economic distribution. Gender determines the division within paid labour between higher-paid, male dominated manufacturing and professional occupation and lower-paid, female dominated 'pink collar' and domestic service occupations (ibid).

Secondly, Fraser (2003, p.34) points out that an appropriate understanding of justice necessitates both 'redistribution' and 'recognition' dimensions of the issue, and argues that reducing one dimension to the other should be avoided. Fraser draws attention to a possible claim that by distributing an adequate amount of resources to a person with marginalised social standing, injustice caused by his/her social standing will be solved (ibid). Citing the example of an African-American Wall Street banker who cannot get a taxi to pick him up, Fraser emphasises the necessity to fully acknowledge the bi-dimensional understanding of justice, without reducing it either to the 'redistribution' or 'recognition' paradigm alone (ibid).[15]

Fraser (2003, pp. 36-37) then proposes 'participatory parity' as the idea of justice which serves as a normative criterion to assess states of affairs more appropriately than its alternatives. According to 'participatory parity', 'justice requires social arrangements that permit all (adult) members of society to interact with one another as peers'. For 'participatory parity' to be possible, Fraser argues, at least two conditions must be satisfied. Firstly, 'the distribution of material resources must be such as to ensure participants' independence and 'voice'' (ibid). That is, deprivation of material means is an injustice when this denies deprived people of opportunities to interact with others as peers. Secondly, for 'participatory parity' to be possible, institutionalised patterns of cultural value must express equal respect for all participants and ensure equal opportunity for achieving social esteem (ibid). The institutionalised norms that systematically depreciate some categories of people and the qualities associate with them should be precluded for 'participatory parity' to be realised.

In her more recent work (2008), Fraser adds the third dimension to

[15] A similar incident of misrecognition is mentioned in the autobiography of the Harvard Professor, Dr Cornel West. In the incident, due to his skin colour, no taxi stopped to pick him up (West, 2010).

'participatory parity'. That is, a political dimension. Thus, for the sake of 'participatory parity', political boundaries and/or decision rules should function rightly to provide all the people with the possibility of participating on a par with others in political arenas (Fraser, 2008, pp.18-19). In this framework, injustices are electoral systems which do not work to represent all the constituencies and arbitrary framing of political boundary which exclude those affected by an issue from public reasoning about it (ibid).

In the light of its definition, it is clear that Fraser's 'participatory parity' is another elaboration of the concept of equal dignity. What is remarkable in her elaboration is that equal dignity is understood as treating a person appropriately in three dimensions – material distribution, cultural recognition and political representation. Another characteristic of Fraser's elaboration is its emphasis on relationality. That is, in order to judge whether a person's dignity is safeguarded or not, Fraser proposes to see her/his level of participation in social life. In Fraser's account of justice, material resources, socio-cultural recognition and political representation are means for a more important end – i.e., one's capacity to take part in social life and interact with others as peers.

**(3) Gustavo Pereira's elaboration of equal dignity**

A critical theorist, Gustavo Pereira (2013) developed the concept of 'reciprocal recognition autonomy' as the ultimate normative ideal, as he claims, relevant to any critical theory of justice. Pereira (2013, p.1) explicitly states that 'reciprocal recognition autonomy' is an elaboration of equal dignity which has been, in his view, the most important concept in contemporary theories of justice. As in the case of Fraser (2003, 2008), Pereira contends that for any idea of justice to be convincing, it needs to successfully synthesise the two paradigms of 'recognition' and 'redistribution' into a single theoretical framework.

In order to develop his own elaboration of equal dignity, Pereira decides to build on Axel Honneth's *Struggle for Recognition* (1995). Departing from Frankfurt School's exclusive focus on material production as the locus of emancipatory critique, Honneth's work (1995) foregrounds the importance of 'recognition' in self-realisation. In so doing, Honneth systematically reconstructs Georg Hegel's early writings on 'struggles for recognition' and draws on 'three forms of recognition' developed in George Herbert Mead's social psychology (ibid). Consequently, Honneth's work has had a lasting impact on the literature of theories of justice (Tully, 2000; Brink and Owen, 2007; Ikäheimo et al., 2021).

Honneth's model of 'reciprocal recognition' comprises three stages in which a person needs three types of recognition to become an agent capable of taking part in the life of society and pursuing goals that she/he considers valuable (ibid). At the first stage of reciprocal recognition, a person needs to be recognised in the domain of intimate and primary relationships (ibid). By experiencing love and friendship,

she/he comes to acknowledge that she/he is a subject in need, and brings loving care for the other's wellbeing in light of their individual needs. As a result of successful affective reciprocal recognition, she/he will obtain basic self-confidence. Consequently, she/he acquires the capacity to trust her/his own bodies and needs, and to engage in critical reflection and creative activities.

The second stage of reciprocal recognition takes place in the domain of legal relationships (ibid). In this legal domain, a person needs to be given equal rights without experiencing discriminatory legal treatment. Through this reciprocal recognition process, she/he is expected to become morally responsible as a citizen, and thereby develops self-respect as a rights holder.

Lastly, a person needs to be recognised in the sphere of social relationships (ibid). In this social domain, her/his traits and abilities need to be esteemed as contributions to society while she/he has to endorse those of others as valuable contributions to society. Honneth (1995) argues that by being positively valued in terms of modes of one's individual and/or collective life (e.g., sexual orientation, occupation and cultural practices that one upholds), one develops self-esteem. With the development of self-esteem, one will be able to form one's own conception of the good (in the form of a life plan) and to consider it as valuable.

Expanding beyond Honneth's *Struggle for Recognition* (1995), Pereira (2013) theorises that through these three types of relationships, a person obtains 'reciprocal recognition autonomy' – which is an ideal characteristic that a person can develop. Pereira (2013) elaborates the concept of 'reciprocal recognition autonomy' in relation to ideal persons who 'can effectively lead their own lives and take part in dialogue, can justify their own positions with reasons, can raise claims or express dissent' (Pereira, 2013, p.8). Pereira (2013) theorises that a person with 'reciprocal recognition autonomy' would 'be capable of feeling enough self-assurance to trust in emotions, support positions with reasons and consider one's life plan valuable' (Pereira, 2013, p.4). Pereira (2013) defines this autonomy as relational which is attained through the three stages described above – i.e., 'through the interpersonal relationship in which one individual's normative expectation are considered by another person, who in turn in relevant and recognised by the first person as able to provide recognition' (Pereira, 2013, p.3). As in Honneth's model, Pereira argues that in order to ensure its development, 'rights and opportunities must be protected, as well as access to resources and relational contexts' (Pereira, 2013, p. 45), and the factors to stunt its development – e.g., material deprivation as well as social marginalisation – should be rectified.

I argue that Pereira's elaboration of equal dignity as 'reciprocal recognition autonomy' has two key characteristics. Firstly, in elaborating his concept of equal dignity, Pereira places emphasis on relationality. For Pereira, in promotion of equal dignity, appropriate relationships in the three domains – intimate relationships, legal relationships and socio-cultural relationships – are indispensable. Secondly,

Pereira also articulates that the promotion of equal dignity requires a variety of means such as adequate material resources and rights because these are requisites for realising the appropriate relationships.

### 3.3 Key constituents of equal dignity

The previous section examined different elaborations of the concept of equal dignity by the prominent egalitarian theorists of justice. Despite their consensus to give an architectural role to the concept, the examination highlighted the diverse elaborations of the concept. I now draw attention to similarities among their elaborations and highlight overlapping, key constituents of the concept, going beyond the broad Kantian concept introduced in Section 3.1.

First of all, all the theorists characterise equal dignity as something intrinsic to a human being. In my view, they begin with the belief that everyone is born equal and thus deserves respect but their subsequent incorporation into social structures that are often hierarchical and exploitative threatens their dignity. That is why, I argue, they are urged to specify means to address these threats.

Secondly, all the theorists emphasise that both material resources and socio-cultural recognition are necessary for maintaining one's dignity. This point is explicitly advanced by Fraser (2003, 2008) and Pereira (2013) who theorise that both maldistribution – i.e., material deprivation – and misrecognition – i.e., discrimination and marginalisation due to one's social standing – need to be addressed for 'participatory parity' and 'reciprocal recognition' to be safeguarded. Despite her proposition of 'capabilities' as the informational base, Nussbaum (2000, 2006) also implicitly argues that adequate material resources and non-discriminatory treatment are necessary for guaranteeing one's dignity.

Thirdly, all the theorists consider political rights as an outworking of the implication of equal dignity. They theorise that without political rights such as the rights to vote, hold public office, of free speech and assembly, one's dignity cannot be maintained. This suggests that against the benchmark of equal dignity, anyone being deprived of the political rights and thus excluded from public reasoning is not normatively acceptable.

Fourthly, these egalitarian theorists place a particular emphasis on one's capacity to reason and take part in discussion. For instance, Nussbaum (2006) explicitly theorises that guaranteeing one's dignity means to let one develop the capacity of practical reason (i.e., the capacity to form a conception of the good and to engage in critical reflection about the planning of one's life). In a similar vein, for Pereira (2013), having dignity means that one is capable of forming one's life plan and of taking part in discussion with others by stating reasons for one's stand. Fraser's (2008) proposition of political participation as one of the three key dimensions of 'participatory parity' also indicates how crucial one's capacity to reason and take part in discussion is for safeguarding one's dignity. Their argument

has a striking similarity with Bohman's concept of 'political functioning' which refers to capacities of strong reasoning and persuasive discussion required in public reasoning (see Section 2.3). This suggests that against the benchmark of equal dignity, anyone being deprived of 'political functioning' is not normatively acceptable.

The discussion thus far points to a conclusion that although there exist differences in the ways these egalitarian theorists of justice elaborate on their concept of equal dignity, there are many important similarities. I argue that these similarities demonstrate that the core constituents of equal dignity are widely shared among egalitarian theorists, and thus provide us with a more tangible understanding of the concept.

### 3.4 Normative criterion and Sen

As discussed in Section 2.2, Sen declines to advance a specific list of capabilities to be promoted by a society, arguing that people in each context will and ought to do so through public reasoning. In addition, unlike the aforementioned theorists of justice, Sen (2012, p. 333) refuses even to specify a normative criterion by which claims for justice may be assessed. While Sen's emphasis on self-determination and context is a strength, I argued for the necessity to augment Sen's theoretical framework with a normative criterion so as to develop my own theoretical model. This leads to a critical question: Is the normative criterion of equal dignity compatible with Sen's theoretical framework of justice?

I argue that the concept of equal dignity is compatible with his theoretical framework of justice. Firstly, Sen's theoretical framework of justice was developed from his work on social choice theory (Sen, 2009, pp.87-113, 2017, p.426). Among many of his great contributions is his 'liberal paradox' (1970) which shows that the Pareto principle (i.e., the optimal distribution of utility) conflicts with 'minimal liberty' (i.e., safeguarding people's basic liberty and rights in a broad sense). Later, in his *Minimal Liberty* (1992b) Sen explicitly argues against the violation of people's basic rights by using examples of 'the right to religious freedom' (1992 b, p.142) and 'the right to social security' (1992b, p.143). While he does not detail what would constitute 'minimal liberty' in the form of a list of rights, his stand shows that rights are important to his social choice work and thus compatible with his framework of justice.

Secondly, Sen himself claims that his theoretical framework 'accommodates the idea of human rights' (2017 p.426). This is exemplified by the chapter entitled Human Rights and Global Imperatives in *The Idea of Justice* (Sen, 2009, pp. 355-387). The chapter starts with the statement that human rights are the idea that 'every person anywhere in the world, irrespective of citizenship, residence, race, class, caste or community, has some basic rights which others should respect' (Sen, 2009, p.355). Interestingly, his idea of human rights has a stark similarity with the Kantian

concept of equal dignity presented in Section 3.1. In addition, in Sections 3.1 and 3.2, it was discussed that human rights are founded on the concept of equal dignity (Nussbaum, 2000, 2006, Sayer, 2011). Thus, it could be said that the concept of equal dignity underlies Sen's idea of human rights, and augmenting Sen's theoretical framework with the concept will not cause any inconsistency at all.

Thirdly, for Sen's theoretical framework of justice, human rights in a broad sense are actually given a critical role in reducing injustice through public reasoning. In that chapter on human rights, Sen draws attention to the normative guiding force of human rights in public reasoning (Sen, 2009, pp. 355-387). For Sen, 'proclamation of human rights…are really strong ethical pronouncements as to what *should* be done' and 'the ethical assertion is about the critical importance of certain freedoms…and the need to accept some social obligations to promote or safeguard these freedoms' (Sen, 2009, pp. 357-358). Later, Sen elaborates on this normative guiding force of human rights by using an actual example from Pakistan (Tasioulas and Sen, 2018). The example goes back to the incident several years ago when the Taliban occupied the Swat valley in Pakistan and introduced a very strict dress codes for women (ibid). Sen points out that even though the Pakistani law did not allow Taliban to whip women who violated the dress codes, people in the country remained silent about the situation. Then, Sen draws attention to the action of an NGO staff member from Pakistan's Human Rights Commission who video-taped the whipping scene and put the video on Pakistan cable television as a violation of human rights. Sen argues that his brave action instigated public reasoning about this issue and consequently, people in Pakistan began to see the situation as violation of human rights and collectively pressurised the government to take action to improve the situation (ibid).

Thus, I argue that augmenting Sen's framework with the concept of equal dignity does not cause any inconsistency at all. This is because the concept of equal dignity is underlying his theoretical framework of justice which accommodates and even gives a critical role to the idea of human rights. In the following section, I discuss how aptly the concept of equal dignity augments Sen's theoretical framework by meeting the three standards specified in Section 2.4.

### 3.5 Advantages of equal dignity as the normative criterion

Firstly, while not describing a utopian society, the model which has the normative criterion of equal dignity shows what constitute injustice and thus can provide guidance as to what counts as a more or less just state of affairs. In cases where competing claims exist, this criterion can be applied, and those which fulfil the criterion are acceptable. Thus, the model advances toward addressing the limit in Sen's framework that people cannot consensually identify injustice in the face of social reality muddled with problematic situations.

Secondly, the model augmented with the normative criterion of equal dignity

explicitly directs society to include those excluded from public reasoning in it. Because of the key constituents of equal dignity, the concept clearly judges that exclusion of people from public reasoning both in formal and substantial terms as unjust. Such an understanding of equal dignity is aptly seen as an elaboration of Sen's key concept of 'comprehensive outcome' – i.e., not only the outcome but the process to reach it matters. Having specified a socially inclusive approach to public reasoning, the model with the normative criterion then requires a wider range of people to deliberate and discuss issues regarding which reaching a consensus may be a challenge. Anticipating more invigorated operation of public reasoning by the voice of those previously excluded, the model takes a further step to addressing the limit in Sen's framework that people cannot consensually identify injustice.

Finally, the concept of equal dignity is invoked by those striving to bring about emancipatory changes and embedded in legal frameworks in a variety of social contexts. Thus, adding the concept of equal dignity to the model, not as a specification of an entirely just society, but as the broad normative criterion to decide on competing claims for justice, will not undermine the pragmatic advantage of Sen's theoretical framework.

## 4. Nancy Fraser's concept of subaltern counter public

### 4.1 Why Fraser's concept of subaltern counter public?

Through the discussions thus far, I singled out two indispensable building blocks to comprise the theoretical model: (1) the normative criterion and (2) the procedure to move a situation towards one which better fulfils the normative criterion. That said, the model needs to be developed further.

As discussed in Section 2.3, the idealised and over-individualised elements in Sen's theoretical framework of justice makes an enormous gulf between the public reasoning described in his approach and its operation on the ground. More concretely, in contrast to Sen's idealised public reasoning, in reality, people with disadvantageous social standing tend to be excluded from public reasoning, the interlocutors do not exercise public reason impartially, pay little attention to the voice of those disadvantaged, and tend to conform to the dominant public opinion without raising radical dissent. In addition, public reasoning in practice takes place in a far more dynamic way than Sen's over-individualised concept, involving multiple individuals who often take collective action and whose views are shaped by coming into dialogue with many others. Because of this gulf, any attempt to directly apply the model to real-world contexts becomes problematic.

In the face of this problem, I argue that what is missing in the model is (3) a more grounded strategy to actualise the practical efficacy or the justice-promoting potential of Sen's theoretical framework of justice. I propose that Nancy Fraser's concept of subaltern counter public (SCP) developed in her theory of public spheres

(1990, 2008) aptly lays the basis for such a practically grounded strategy.

Firstly, as will be discussed shortly, the starting point of Fraser's theory of public spheres is her critique of Habermas's theory of public spheres (1989). The core assumption of his theory is that interlocutors in the public sphere can bracket status differentials and thus deliberate as if they were social equals (ibid). Drawing attention to the actual status differentials in the public sphere, Fraser (1990, 2008) advances the concept of SCP as an effective strategy to address disparities in political voice. Given the stark similarity between Habermas's core assumption and Sen's idealisation that persons engage in public discussion with other impartially motivated individuals (see Section 2.3), I argue that Fraser's concept of SCP aptly augments Sen's theoretical framework of justice.

Secondly, Fraser's theory of public spheres has the strength of building on key propositions of contemporary public sphere theories which have been substantially influenced by the examination of actual operation of democratic society and social movements. In the literature, it has been commonly agreed that defensible public sphere theories need to specify both state institutions and civil society as the potential arenas of democratic deliberation (Benhabib, 1992; Young, 2000; Pereira, 2013). A growing number of theorists of the public spheres also propose that any defensible accounts of public spheres should not have an a priori demarcation between public and private (ibid) (Benhabib, 1992; Young, 2000; Pereira, 2013). I argue that Fraser's theory of public spheres which builds on these key propositions is both theoretically strong and more practically grounded as is her concept of SCP.

Preserving for later the extensive discussion on why Fraser's concept of SCP aptly augments Sen's theoretical framework of justice and thus should become a building block of the theoretical model, I lay out Fraser's theory of public spheres, focusing on her concept of SCP in the following section. In doing so, I present Fraser's critique of Habermas's theory of public spheres (1989). My purpose is not to enter into discussion of Habermas' theory per se, but simply to discuss the usefulness of Fraser's, in particular, her concept of SCP.

### 4.2 Multiple public spheres, SCPs and counter discourses

In spite of acknowledging that the concept of public sphere is a conceptual resource with the potential to contribute to struggles for emancipation, Fraser (1990) questions the popular, mainstream conceptualisation of public sphere as a single discursive space in democracy. She points out that such mainstream conceptualisation of public sphere is substantially informed by the theorisation of Jürgen Habermas (1989) who expounds on the liberal model of the bourgeois public sphere where bourgeois people assemble to discuss matters of public concern, and the result of such public discussions is public opinion in the strong sense of a consensus about the common good.

Fraser (1990, p.62) challenges the four assumptions she sees as underlying Habermas's theory of public sphere: (1) as the public sphere 'preserves a kind of social intercourse that…disregards status altogether…the authority of the better argument can assert itself against that of social hierarchy' (Habermas, 1989, p.36); (2) 'the fully developed public sphere is based on the fictitious identity of…individuals who come together to form a public…(so) the public sphere appears as one and indivisible' (Habermas, 1989, p.56); (3) 'the model of the bourgeois public sphere presupposes strict separation of the public from the private realm in such a way that…people gather together as a public and articulate the needs of society' 'excluding special (private) interests' (Habermas, 1989, p.176 and 178); and (4) 'the basis of the public sphere…(is) the separation of state and civil society' (Habermas, 1989, p.142)'.

Critically examining Habermas's theory of public sphere, first of all, Fraser (1990) argues that, contrary to Habermas' first assumption, exclusion of certain groups of people from the public sphere due to social hierarchy has been the norm. Citing historical examples from North America and Europe, Fraser (1990) points out that women of all classes and ethnicities were excluded from official, political participation on the basis of ascribed gender status. She also draws attention that plebeian men were formally excluded by property qualifications, and women and men of racialised ethnicities of all classes were also excluded on racial grounds (ibid). Fraser (1990, 2008) further argues that even when the marginalised get included in the deliberation process in the public sphere, social inequality taints the deliberation process and tends to operate to the advantage of the dominant groups and to the disadvantage of the marginalised. Thus, she concludes, against Habermas's assumption, that domination of the public sphere by certain groups of people remains to be the reality (ibid).

Secondly, Fraser (1990) challenges the second assumption by Habermas: i.e., the public sphere should appear as one and indivisible so as to be functional. She contends that, not least in stratified societies, arrangements that accommodate contestation among a plurality of competing publics better promote the ideal of equal participation in public discussion than a single public (ibid). That is, holding that there is one, single public sphere exacerbates the existing exclusion of certain kinds of people – e.g., women, workers, ethnic and sexual minorities, the aged and those with (dis) abilities – from public discussion (ibid). In her view, this is problematic as those typically excluded would be deprived of the opportunity to ponder over what they have reason to value and find the right voice or words to express their thoughts (ibid). She strongly argues that engaging in discussion itself has a function for interlocutors to clarify their values, interests and identities, and they would be more skilful in justifying their stand as a result of such discussions (ibid). Examining historical findings, she points out that members of these marginalised social groups have repeatedly formed alternative publics which she

calls *subaltern counter publics (SCPs)* (ibid). She claims that historically, SCPs have often formulated a counter discourse against dominant ones, and disseminated such voices of dissent to society at large by joining existing public spheres dominated by powerful groups, and creating new public spheres (ibid).

Thirdly, Fraser (1990) critiques Habermas's assumption that subjects of discussion in the public sphere should pertain only to public issues, and private ones should be excluded. She argues that the boundary between 'public issues' and 'private issues' is, in fact, blurred (ibid). She points out that historically the term 'public' was used so as to set some claims crucial for many marginalised people aside by labelling them 'private' (ibid). One such instance that Fraser cites is the issue of domestic violence (ibid). Until quite recently, feminists were the minority in thinking that domestic violence against women was a matter of common concern, and thus a legitimate topic of public discussion (ibid). Against this backdrop, feminists formed an SCP from which they disseminated a view of domestic violence as a systemic institutional features of male-dominated societies (ibid). After sustained dissemination of the counter discourse, they succeeded in making it a public concern, that is, an issue commonly experienced by many women in society (ibid). Therefore, Fraser strongly argues that the scope of public debate should not be delimited and only interlocutors themselves can decide what is the common good and a public issue for them (ibid).

Finally, Fraser (1990) challenges what she views as Habermas's fourth assumption: i.e., a sharp separation between state and civil society is a requisite for a functioning democratic society. Habermas (1989, p.30) emphasises that civil society consists of 'private people' such that their discourse does not result in sovereign decision, authorising the use of state power. Habermas (1989, p.142) also theorises that the civil society's function is 'the binding of all state activity to a system of norms legitimated by public opinion' such that civil society is an independent and autonomous arena for public discussion. Fraser (1990) points out that Habermas's assumption does not hold true in reality because of the emergence of parliamentary sovereignty in modern democracy (ibid). That is, sovereign parliaments function as a public sphere within the state, playing a role of both decision-making which authorises the use of state power and forming a public opinion. The bottom line of her critique is that in practice, the line of demarcation between civil society and the state has become blurred in modern democracy.

Fraser, instead, proposes an alternative theory of public spheres with a distinction of *strong publics* and *weak publics* (Fraser, 1990). In her theory, the concept of *strong publics* refers to those whose discourse encompasses both public opinion formation and decision-making authorising the use of state power. And, the concept of *weak publics* refers to those whose discourse results exclusively in public opinion formation. With this conceptualisation of multiple publics, some groups – e.g., political parties – belong to strong publics while others – e.g.,

grassroots feminist groups – are classified as weak publics (ibid). Nevertheless, both types of publics deliberate and discuss their goals and interests as matters of (potentially) public concern. Another difference between them is their realm of operation. Strong publics tend to operate more in formal institutions such as parliaments and ministries, which is in accordance with the typical understanding of the public sphere (ibid). On the other hand, the operation of weak publics is more observable in informal spaces, and it is often the case that weak publics create public spheres on their own (ibid). Nonetheless, Fraser also points out that there are hybrid groups which are classified as both strong and weak publics, and it is also possible that a group which was previously just a weak public becomes a strong public by registering itself as a political party (ibid).

In her theory of public spheres, Fraser (1990) further theorises that inter-public coordination is indispensable if an SCP – which tends to emerge as a weak public – would like to bring about radical social change. An SCP cannot remain in an enclave separate from society at large because transforming dominant discourse requires an SCP to disseminate its voice of dissent to those into wider publics (ibid). Thus, Fraser argues, an SCP needs to collaborate with other weak publics to involve more people in discussion, to prompt them to give a second thought to their beliefs and perception about certain issues – e.g., the acceptability of violence against women – and to form a new sort of public opinion (ibid). In addition, she contends that an SCP eventually needs to coordinate its activism with strong publics capable of both influencing public opinion formation in society and changing government policies and laws. Emphasising the significance of inter-public coordination, Fraser (1990, p.86) concludes 'unless multiple public spheres are able to communicate with and influence one another, they are only parochial separatist enclaves with little role to play in a process of solving problems that cross groups or problems that concern relationships among groups'.

Finally, Fraser (1990) theorises that an SCP's emancipatory potential rests on its dual function. On the one hand, it works as the space of withdrawal and regroupment for those marginalised in and/or excluded from public reasoning and thus they can formulate oppositional interpretations of their identities, interests and needs. On the other hand, the SCP functions as bases and training grounds for agitational activities directed toward wider publics including those in the main and official public sphere. Fraser's argument about this dual function not only re-emphasises the importance of an SCP's outward activism to bring about social change, but also draws attention the critical role of the safe incubating space where those marginalised in and/or excluded from public reasoning can come together to discuss what is important for them.

In her later work, Fraser (2008) critiques traditional theories of public spheres,

including her own (1990).[16] Therein, she problematises the commonly held assumption among theorists that a public sphere is appropriately demarcated by the nation-state boundary. In the face of the overflow of discursive interaction beyond the nation state boundary, Fraser (2008, p.96) proposes that 'what turns a collection of people into fellow members of a public is neither shared citizenship or nationality, nor common possession of abstract personhood, nor the sheer fact of causal interdependence, but rather their joint subjection to a structure of governance that sets the ground rules for their interaction.' That is, Fraser (2008) argues that all those who are subject to a given governance structure have moral standing as the interlocutors of public discussion on the subjects related to the governance structure.

As such, Fraser (2008) raises an important point regarding interlocutors in public spheres in the time of globalisation. That is, it is likely that 'interlocutors are not fellow members of a political community, with equal rights to participate in political life' (Fraser, 2008, p.77). Consequently, while her original theorisation of an SCP gives one the impression that members of an SCP are homogeneous, her new theorisation emphasises more fluid understanding of publics and the possibility that those who comprise an SCP may well be heterogeneous.

### 4.3 Advantages of Fraser's concept of SCP

I conclude this section by discussing advantages of Fraser's concept of SCP as a more grounded strategy in practice to actualise the efficacy of Sen's theoretical framework of justice.

Firstly, a critical advantage of Fraser's concept of SCP is its encapsulation of an effective strategy to reduce disparities in political voice in public reasoning. Unlike Sen, Fraser explicitly acknowledges the non-ideal reality of public reasoning, and thus advances the concept of SCP. An SCP – a group of people who build and disseminate a counter discourse – is supposed to work to mitigate the problem of certain kinds of people having nominal inclusion or substantial exclusion from public reasoning. An SCP can also address the trivialisation of marginalised people's voices in public reasoning by its capacity to amplify its members' voices by building and disseminating a counter discourse into wider publics.

Secondly, another advantage of Fraser's concept of SCP is its potential to work to promote interlocutors' critical reflection of their thoughts and claims for justice

[16]As mentioned by Fraser (2008), two major changes were made in Habermas's theory of the public sphere in his later work *Between Facts and Norms* (1996). Firstly, Habermas (1996, pp.420-427) acknowledges that the mutual dependence of social position and political voice in the public sphere and analyses the emancipatory role of feminist social movements. Secondly, Habermas (1996, pp.360-363) acknowledges the blurred boundary between the state and civil society as well the dynamics which involves other actors. He acknowledges that, on the one hand, the state's official use of power is influenced by those in parliaments and civil society, and on the other, private social powers and entrenched bureaucratic interests unofficially control law-makers and manipulate public opinion.

by presenting an alternative discourse in public reasoning. While Sen expects the reasoning device of 'impartial spectators' to play this role, I pointed out that in reality, people do not critically scrutinise their thoughts and claims for justice by using it (see Section 2.3). Rather, I concur with Young (2000, p.170) that 'those who raise issues and make claims in public properly can and sometimes should be partial and particular in their concerns and perspectives'. I further argue that what is critical for the justice-promoting operation of public reasoning is to include a variety of people, in particular the marginalised in/excluded from public reasoning, and to get their voices heard in it. Given that different kinds of people may well have very different perspectives and voices, the greater inclusion may result in invigorating public reasoning through bringing in radical dissent. This possibility is underscored by Pereira (2013, pp.186-187) who argues that 'dissent is very important in democracies…dissent allows information and position hidden by conformist behaviour to rise to the surface; thus dissent can strengthen deliberation and public discussion'. As Fraser's concept of SCP is supposed to work to include more voices, in particular, radical dissent, in public reasoning, it has the advantage of being a great possibility to promote interlocutors' critical examination of their thoughts and claims for justice.

Thirdly, Fraser's concept of SCP, when combined with Sen's theoretical framework of justice, has the advantage of bringing to light the collective and inter-subjective dimensions of public reasoning. For instance, the way an SCP addresses disparities in political voice highlights the importance of the collective dimension of public reasoning. That is, the concept of SCP emphasises that for a person excluded from or marginalised in the mainstream public sphere to get entrance to it, she/he needs to come together with a group of like-minded people. In addition, as discussed above, the dynamic way an SCP promotes interlocutors' critical reflection through building and disseminating a counter discourse can be elucidated only by paying due attention to the collective and inter-subjective dimensions of public reasoning. Therefore, I argue that adding Fraser's concept of SCP to the model will enable it to give a better account of justice-promoting operations of public reasoning in practice through accommodating the collective and intersubjective dimensions of public reasoning.

## 5. Conclusion

With the navigational question of 'how can injustice be reduced in practice' at hand, this chapter embarked on philosophical discussion to develop a theoretical model for reducing injustice. In so doing, it took an approach to identify three indispensable building blocks to comprise the model: (1) a normative criterion, (2) a procedure to promote justice, and (3) a more grounded strategy in practice to actualise the efficacy of the procedure.

The chapter set out its discussion by singling out the foundational building

block of the theoretical model – i.e., Sen's theoretical framework of justice. It underscored that Sen's framework is a theoretically sound procedure to promote justice by virtue of its pragmatism, open-endedness and the centrality of public reasoning. Despite having great strengths, the discussion also drew attention to three limits in Sen's framework: it does not have a normative criterion by which the extent of justice may be assessed; and despite its pragmatism, there remain some idealisations related to its concept of public reasoning; and it conceptualises public reasoning in an over-individualised way. Thus, I argued that Sen's theoretical framework needs to be augmented by two additional building blocks of a normative criterion, and a more grounded strategy in practice to actualise the efficacy of Sen's theoretical framework.

Therefore, the chapter proceeded to identify the most appropriate normative criterion – i.e., the concept of equal dignity. Equal dignity refers to the idea that any person on earth is a proper object of respect and has supreme value by her/himself, just by virtue of being human, regardless of her/his position in society and particular characteristics. I argued that the concept of equal dignity aptly augments Sen's framework when added to the model, not as a specification of an entirely just society, but as the broad normative criterion which shows what constitute injustice. This is because, firstly, in case where competing claims exist for what constitutes justice, the normative criterion of equal dignity can be applied, and those which fulfil the criterion are deemed as acceptable. Secondly, the model augmented with the normative criterion of equal dignity explicitly directs society to include those excluded from public reasoning in it while leaving space for dialogue open. Thirdly, the strength of the concept lies in its applicability to a variety of empirical contexts as it has actually been invoked by those involved in social justice struggles and embedded in legal frameworks.

Next, the chapter singled out a more grounded strategy in practice to actualise the potential of Sen's framework to reduce injustice – i.e., Nancy Fraser's concept of SCP. An SCP is a group of people who were previously excluded and/or marginalised from/in public reasoning, and collectively build and disseminate a counter discourse into wider publics. According to Fraser, historically, an SCP has invigorated public reasoning as a voice of dissent, contributing to emancipatory changes by forming alternative public opinion and pressurising the government to bring in new legislation to facilitate the emancipation. Therein, I argued that Fraser's concept of SCP can aptly augment the model by addressing idealised and over-individualised elements in Sen's concept of public reasoning. This is because, firstly, an SCP works to mitigate the problem of certain kinds of people having nominal inclusion or substantial exclusion from public reasoning in practice. Secondly, an SCP operates by prompting interlocutors in public reasoning to critically scrutinise their beliefs and claims for justice. Thirdly, Fraser's concept of SCP encapsulates the collective and inter-subjective dimensions of public reasoning

which are critical for understanding justice-promoting operation of pubic reasoning in practice.

Through this discussion, the following theoretical model has been developed:

***A theoretical model for reducing injustice***

(1) The normative criterion to help decide on competing claims for justice and to have implications for equal participation in public reasoning (the concept of equal dignity)

+

(2) The procedure to move a situation towards greater justice (Sen's theoretical framework of justice)

+

(3) A more grounded strategy in practice to actualise the potential of public reasoning to reduce injustice through greater inclusion (Fraser's concept of SCP)

Having developed the theoretical model, the philosophical discussion of this chapter became a significant step toward addressing the critical inquiry of how justice theorising can be conducive to reducing injustice on the ground. The model is a robust theoretical framework to specify both the idea of justice and a potential path to promote it. In addition, its theoretical arguments being brought down to the ground, it may now be applied to real-world contexts. Thus, in the following chapters, the thesis embarks on empirical exploration to examine how well it applies to empirical contexts where struggles against injustice are being pursued.

## Chapter 3 Applying the theoretical model to empirical contexts

### 1. Introduction

Having developed the theoretical model for reducing injustice through the philosophical discussion, the thesis now embarks on the first part of the empirical exploration. In this chapter, I apply the model to empirical contexts so as to gain feedback on it. For this, I focus on *justice-promoting SCPs* whose counter discourses aptly meet the normative criterion of equal dignity. I pay particular attention to whether the SCPs actually contribute to justice-promoting changes by invigorating public reasoning as theorised in the model.

The chapter uses two empirical cases of a justice-promoting SCP which are presented in sufficient detail. The first is the anti-female genital mutilation (FGM) campaign in Upper Egypt which the capability approach scholar, Solava Ibrahim (2014) researched. Ibrahim (2006, 2011, 2013, 2014) is a prominent capability approach scholar who has extensively written on collective capabilities and agency. Influenced by Appadurai (2004), her study (2014), in particular, yields insights on enablers for collective actions by marginalised people – which is highly relevant to the focus of this chapter. The second case is the pavement and slum dwellers' movement which originated from Mumbai, India and spread into other countries in the global south (Appadurai, 2001, 2004; Patel and Mitlin, 2004; SPARC, 2018). Like the first case, this case is presented in relation to Sen's capability approach by Appadurai (2004) and thus well fits with the capability perspective adopted by the model.

There are three strengths of choosing these cases. Firstly, as discussed in Chapter 2, public reasoning has multiple dimensions, and an SCP works in a dynamic way. Thus, the cases to be analysed should illuminate *the process* how marginalised people have come together to form an SCP and mobilised to promote elementary capabilities. As these cases describe the process of mobilisation in detail, analysing them will greatly help the thesis to elucidate how the core theoretical propositions in the model work in practice. Secondly, these cases develop useful concepts to expound on the process of an SCP's mobilisation while using the capability perspective as the model does. Thus, analysing these cases will help develop the model further by incorporating and/or questioning these concepts, which will enable the thesis to make a contribution to the literature of the human development and capabilities. Thirdly, despite their pursuing unique goals which are shaped by each context, both cases shed light on the issue of gender as in my primary case in West Bengal, India (see Chapters 4, 5 and 6). Thus, exploring these cases will facilitate for the thesis to elucidate how the West Bengal SCP operates to fight against gender injustice.

The chapter takes the following structure. Firstly, it presents the context where an SCP is located. This is followed by the description of how the SCP was formed

by people and what kind of counter discourse was built by them. Next, it lays out the challenges the SCP faced and the degree to which it succeeded in bringing about a positive change in the context. Then, it proceeds to apply the theoretical model, examining whether the SCPs help reduce injustice as theorised in the model and illuminating gaps between its theoretical arguments and the social reality on the ground. The following section presents the context where the anti-FGM campaign is located.

## 2. Anti-FGM campaign in Menia, Upper Egypt

### 2.1 Context, dominant discourse and formation of women's groups

Ibrahim's study (2014) is located in Menia governorate in Upper Egypt. Menia governorate is approximately 200 km south of Cairo and extending about 80 km along the Nile. Coptic Christians constitute about 20 percent of Menia's population and the rest are Muslims. The Menia governorate has the highest incident of poverty in the country (World Bank, 2002, 2009 cited by Ibrahim, 2014). Villages in Menia, in particular, those on the east bank of the Nile, are quite isolated from health facilities (Yount, 2002, cited by Ibrahim, 2014 p.56). Menia is also known for the prevalence of FGM which is illegal in Egypt. A study carried out by Yount (2002, pp.339-350) showed that over 75 percent of the girls, aged 10 to14 in her sample, underwent FGM. Another study by Better Life Association for Comprehensive Development (BLACD), a local NGO, also showed that most of the mothers in the sample (i.e., 65 percent) had practiced FGM on at least one of their daughters, and the rest of the respondents mostly had daughters who were younger than the circumcision age (Bolbol, 2005, cited by Ibrahim, 2014). The study reported that prevalence of FGM on the east bank of Nile in Menia is high as 99.2 percent (Bolbol, 2005).

This prevalence of FGM in Menia was supported by people's positive perception about it. For instance, in a representative sample of 3,000 households in Menia, approximately 80 percent of the adult women considered FGM as beneficial for their daughters (Yount, 2002, cited by Ibrahim, 2014). These adult women believed that FGM is beneficial because it would render girls more 'hygienic' or 'clean', and enhance the girl's social status and economic security by increasing her prospects for marriage (ibid). Similarly, some female respondents of Bolbol's study (2005, pp. 33-48, cited by Ibrahim 2014) said that they practice FGM because 'female genitalia would grow to become as big as the male organs'. This belief seemed to be widespread as one school girl also explained that 'half of the girls in my class are circumcised and tell us (who are not circumcised) that we have to be circumcised. They reproach us and call us males' (Bolbol, 2005, p.45, cited by Ibrahim 2014). Men similarly endorsed the practice of FGM because the 'lust desires' of women need to be controlled and their honour should be protected by

reducing the possibility of their female family members' falling into 'sin' (Bolbol, 2005, pp.33-48, cited by Ibrahim, 2014).

In such a context, BLACD was founded in Menia in 1995. BLACD had been carrying out projects such as water and sewage system building, housing upgrades, and support for quarry workers, farmers and fishermen. BLACD also recruited local women as 'health facilitators' and let them plan awareness raising campaigns about water and sanitation in their community (OSAGI, 2006, cited by Ibrahim, 2014). After several years of its operation in Menia, the founder of BLACD felt that it may be the right time to start working with local women to advocate against the practice of FGM (ibid). By this time, the women who were involved in BLACD's projects also became interested in forming their own groups to address existing problems in their community, in particular, the practice of FGM. Receiving support from BLACD, these women began to network with other women in neighbouring villages and formed their own group to combat the practice FGM in 2003 (ibid). This encouraged women from another village to participate in the anti-FGM campaign, which resulted in the formation of another anti-FGM campaign group in 2004 (ibid).

These women's groups have approximately 25 members each, comprising women who do not have paid work, are government employees, teachers and former health facilitators for BLACD projects (ibid). BLACD provided these women with training in communication and comprehensive knowledge of FGM. It also gave them material resources necessary for engaging in the campaign (ibid).

### 2.2 Building and disseminating a counter discourse

With the goal of eradicating the practice of FGM, these women's groups had to disseminate their anti-FGM message to a wide range of people in the community – i.e., mothers and their daughters, the youth, religious men, local leaders, midwives and media representatives. In order to reach such a wide range of people, these women took a variety of strategies. These included organising marches, composing songs and distributing drawings and posters, and conducting home visits and holding communal meetings to advocate the prohibition of FGM and women's rights (ibid). In addition, the two women's groups helped solve problems that local women faced by modernising their household ovens, issuing identification cards and birth certificates, and carrying out illiteracy-eradication classes (ibid). Such community service also played a strategic role in building trust between the campaigners and the community people, and facilitated their campaign.

The women's groups also carefully crafted their anti-FGM message to transform people's positive perception about FGM. Firstly, these women not only explained the dangers of FGM but also highlighted that there is no relationship between FGM and religions dominant in Menia (i.e., Islam and Christianity) (ibid). For instance, they pointed out that the Prophet himself did not circumcise his

daughters and that FGM is not practised in Saudi Arabia. In addition, by collaborating with Christian organisations such as Saint Mark in Menia and the Coptic Youth Association, they asked priests in church to articulate that FGM is not related to Christianity. Secondly, they also explained people that there is another way to protect family honour even if they do not circumcise their daughters – that is, by educating their daughters, a family's honour would be protected (ibid).

As part of the campaign, BLACD played an important role in disseminating the anti-FGM message into a wide range of people. In the first place, BLACD facilitated the two women groups' anti-FGM campaign by providing them with database to keep track of the location of teenage girls who were to be circumcised (ibid). BLACD also helped the women organise a variety of anti-FGM awareness seminars targeting religious men, midwives, media people and Arabic teachers who taught religion in school (ibid). Among these target population, the challenge was to reach religious men who adamantly believed that FGM is a requisite for teenage girls and thus rejected to listen to the campaigners. As a strategy to tackle this challenge, BLACD and the women's groups established a partnership with government organisations. Then, they sent invitation letters for anti-FGM awareness seminars to religious men through the Ministry of Endowment which was the major employer of the religious men (ibid).

Not limiting itself to the facilitating role, BLACD acted to raise awareness about the danger of FGM among the girls in the community. For example, BLACD organised an event called 'dream day' in which girls were encouraged to express their ideas about FGM through drawings, songs and toys (ibid). Collaborating with schools, BLACD also offered girls a special educational curriculum. This aimed at familiarising the girls with different types of FGM, the difference between male and female circumcision, the health risks of FGM, its relationship with religion, and the myths related to the practice (ibid). Moreover, BLACD established a facilitating committee in the local administration of Menia governorate. BLACD did so with the hope that the committee would serve as a space for discussing its projects and realising coordination with government organisations to tackle community problems (ibid).

### 2.3 Facing resistance, overcoming it and remaining difficulties

In engaging in the campaign, the women faced some resistance. Firstly, at the outset the FGM campaign, there emerged tension between these women and their families (ibid). This happened because the women's engaging in the campaign resulted in reshaping gender roles in their households. For instance, the campaigners had to go out more frequently, travel to distant cities and even receive 'unknown' visitors in their homes, especially during the communal meetings against FGM (ibid). While they tried to make their family members understand that being part of the campaign may require them to act in unconventional ways, gaining the family understanding

was not easy. The familial tension resulted in some women being threatened with divorce by their husbands (ibid). In order to appease their families, many women organised anti-FGM communal meetings in their homes while ensuring that they fulfilled household duties (ibid).

The second sort of resistance that the campaigners faced was resistance by community people. Most religious leaders were reluctant to cooperate with the campaigners, and some of the leaders even waged a 'counter-campaign' against the anti-FGM campaign and called them atheists (ibid). In the face of this, they patiently negotiated with the religious leaders. Consequently, as mentioned above, priests in some churches began to support the anti-FGM campaign. In addition, in June 2007, the Egyptian Ministry of Health issued a decree to prohibit the practice of FGM in response to the death of a 12-year-old girl due to FGM in Menia (ibid). This move by the government changed Islamic religious scholars' attitude as they eventually issued a fatwa (i.e., religious verdict) to forbid the practice (ibid).

The campaign also faced resistance by midwives who benefited financially from practising FGM. While being aware that practising FGM is illegal in Egypt, these midwives continued the practice for their livelihood (ibid). In order to address their resistance, BLACD provided the midwives with micro-credit to help them establish their own enterprises as alternative income sources. The campaigners also patiently engaged in discussion with the midwives about why the practice must be stopped, and this made many of the midwives become supportive of the campaign and even transformed some of them to be part of it (ibid).

Reflecting on the journey of the anti-FGM campaign, an campaigner drew attention to the positive changes brought about by the campaign as follows:

*As a result of our advocacy work, people in our communities now at least have the courage to oppose the practice of FGM. A woman can stand up and speak about her misery and how her bodily integrity was violated. Some circumcised women even started associating their 'unsatisfying sexual relations' with their husbands with their circumcision. (A campaigner cited by Ibrahim, 2014, p.67)*

While successfully challenging the widespread practice of FGM and making many people in the community understand its danger, the campaign had some serious limits. Firstly, other NGOs did not support the anti-FGM campaign and thus, the campaign stopped short of becoming a larger force to eradicate the practice of FGM. While there were a few NGOs in Menia, they were reluctant to network with the campaign. This was because the NGOs were afraid that supporting the radical campaign would lead to community opposition (ibid). In addition, the fact that addressing such an entrenched custom of FGM required a long time had discouraged these NGOs to be part of the campaign (ibid).

Secondly, while the campaign made many people in the community understand the danger of FGM, these people still could not openly support the eradication of FGM. This was because of the social pressure on those deviating from the norm. In addition, these people feared that not circumcising their daughters could jeopardise their marriage prospects (ibid).Thus, these people covertly spared their daughters from FGM but did not tell others that they had done so (ibid).

Finally, the campaign continued to face resistance by young men in the community. According to a campaigner 'many of these men simply slammed the doors in our faces and refused to even listen to us' (Ibrahim 2014, p.67). Due to their defiant attitude, the young men remained uninformed about the danger of FGM (ibid). In order to handle this difficulty, the campaigners began to ask religious leaders to talk to them regarding the harm of the FGM (ibid).

### 2.4 Applying the theoretical model to the FGM campaign in Egypt

First of all, through the lens of the model, the FGM campaign is seen as a manifestation of an SCP. This is because rural women who were previously excluded from public reasoning created their own groups and, in collaboration with a local NGO, BLACD, began to question the publicly endorsed custom of FGM. Through its campaign, this SCP built and disseminated the anti-FGM discourse that the practice should be stopped because it not only severely undermines women's health and bodily integrity but also threatens their lives. Thus, the model identified the SCP as a justice-promoting one because its counter discourse is conducive to social change which better fulfils the normative criterion of equal dignity.

In this empirical context, through their coming together, contemplation and discussion, the SCP members (consisting of the two women's group and BLACD) reached a conclusion that FGM is a problematic practice and so cannot be promoted as a publicly endorsed custom. According to the model, this phenomenon is interpreted as that the SCP members consensually identified FGM as injustice through public reasoning.

The exploration also brought attention that in identifying the practice of FGM as injustice, the campaigners in Upper Egypt did not invoke the concept of equal dignity. Rather, it illuminated that they collectively stood up against FGM due to its immediate serious harms to women. Nonetheless, they utilised the concept of rights – an expression of equal dignity – in order to advance its campaign against FGM. Thus, the model needs to take into account the fact that in this empirical context, the concept of equal dignity did not galvanise the local people to form an SCP but served as a discursive resource, in the expression of rights, for the SCP's campaign.

The exploration also underscored the conflictual and dynamic nature of public reasoning invigorated by the SCP. That is, in this empirical context, there existed a variety of people who resisted the campaign, claiming that FGM is a valuable

custom and should be continued. This is exemplified by the resistance by the religious men who launched a 'counter campaign' to promote the practice of FGM and the young men who slammed the doors in front of the campaigners. Thus, we can see that the SCP members' engaging in public reasoning with wider publics did not smoothly result in identifying FGM as injustice in the community as a whole, let alone its eradication.

While public reasoning regarding the status of FGM was an ongoing process in this empirical context, the exploration illuminated that the SCP's campaign shifted the public reasoning on the status of FGM in favour of its eradication. This is exemplified by the fact that after a decade of contestations, converging with the supportive discourse (i.e., the Egyptian Ministry of Health's decree to prohibit the practice of FGM) and legislation from the government (i.e., FGM is an illegal act in Egypt), the SCP's counter discourse helped to persuade more and more people not to circumcise their daughters.[17] Thus, the exploration revealed that the justice-promoting operation of the SCP was not stand-alone. Rather, its operation was significantly influenced by other entities. This finding is in accordance with Fraser's core proposition that in practice, there exist multiple publics and, among them, a strong public which has both opinion formation and legislative power plays a key role in promoting the campaign of an SCP.

The exploration also underscored that the SCP members – in particular, women –transformed themselves to be capable of building and disseminating the counter discourse by coming together. Initially, these women were neither capable of raising their voice nor effectively challenging the practice of FGM. However, by their interacting with each other as well as BLACD staff, they became competent campaigners who were capable of negotiating the variety of difficulties and resistances. This finding seems to be relevant to Fraser's key argument of SCP's dual function mentioned in Chapter 2 Section 4: on the one hand, an SCP works as the space of withdrawal and regroupment for those marginalised and thus they can formulate oppositional interpretations of their identities, interests and needs; on the other hand, the SCP functions as bases and training grounds for agitational activities directed toward wider publics including those in the main and official public sphere. The finding implies that the relational perspective underlying the concept of SCP needs to come to the fore as a key element of the model.

The exploration also drew attention to the fact that the SCP members' *action* played an important role in facilitating the campaign. It was illuminated that the SCP's counter discourse needed to become convincing by substantiating its

[17] While not articulated in Ibrahim's work (2014), the Egyptian government had repeatedly tightened its legal framework to ban FGM in 1996, 2007 and 2008 (UNFPA, 2019). The Egyptian government also hosted regional conferences in 2003 and 2008 with the goal of discussing strategies to combat the practice of FGM in North Africa with other counties' leaders (ibid).

feasibility by actions and gaining trust from other interlocutors in public reasoning. In this empirical context, aside from their anti-FGM campaign, the women campaigners acted to help solve community problems, building trust in the community. BLACD also launched the microfinance scheme for the midwives and transformed them into the campaign's allies. Thus, going beyond its exclusive focus on discourse, the model needs to take into account the importance of action as it may be vital for the success of SCPs' campaigns.

## 3. Pavement and slum dwellers' movement in Mumbai, India[18]

### 3.1 Context and formation of the Alliance

The next empirical case to be examined is the pavement and slum dwellers' movement, which originated from Mumbai, India (Appadurai, 2001, 2004; Patel and Mitlin, 2004; SPARC, 2018). Mumbai is the most populated city in India. Its population exceeds 12 million (Census Population Data, 2011). Hindus constitute 65.99 per cent and Muslims constitute 20.65 per cent of Mumbai's population (ibid). The rest are other religious minorities such as Buddhists and Christians (ibid). The total number of slum households in Mumbai is 1,135,514 in which population of 5,206,473 resides, and this is approximately 41.84 per cent of the city's total population (ibid).

According to Appadurai's study (2001), the millions of pavement and slum dwellers occupied only 8 per cent of the city's land. The rest was used as either industrial, middle- and high-income housing or vacant land in the control of the city, the state or private owners (ibid). Many of these pavement and slum dwellers worked at the low end of white-collar organisations and industrial and commercial centres (ibid). Others engaged in menial occupations such as cart pullers, rag pickers, scullions, sex workers, car cleaners, mechanics' assistants, petty vendors, small-time criminals and temporary workers in petty industrial jobs requiring dangerous physical work, such as ditch digging, metal-hammering, and truck-loading (ibid). According to Appadurai (2001), these pavement and slum dwellers lived in severe poverty, and at the core of the problem was their lack of secure housing. Appadurai (2001) recorded that their temporary shacks had very limited access to running water and electricity. In addition, these shacks were often demolished by the government and destroyed by monsoons (ibid). Appadurai's study (2001) also drew attention that as the insecure shacks did not have sanitary facilities, the poor people were prone to catching diseases, which would increase their need to see doctors to whom they had little access. Appadurai (2001) also recorded that their lack of secure housing made it impossible for them to claim any rights such things as rationed foods, municipal health and education facilities, police protection and voting rights (ibid).

[18] The term 'slum' is a formally defined settlement category in India and its use here follows that designation (Appadurai, 2001, 2004).

In this context, Society for the Promotion of Area Resource Centres (SPARC) was established in 1984 by women who were trained in social work at the Tata Institute for the Social Sciences (Appadurai, 2001, 2004; Patel and Mitlin, 2004; SPARC, 2018). SPARC then provided space for women pavement dwellers to come together and discuss their problems (Patel and Mitlin, 2004). SPARC also encouraged the women to save and manage a credit scheme on their own, and this collective activity resulted in the formation of the women's group, Mahila Milan. In 1986, in order to address the severe poverty in the slums more effectively, SPARC and Mahila Milan made a partnership with National Slum Dwellers Federation (NSDF) (ibid). NSDF was formed in the early 1970s by a group of primarily male community leaders who fought against demolition in their own settlements. By this time, NSDF had become a loose coalition of local federations spreading over 30 cities in India (ibid). By establishing the partnership, NSDF members offered advice and shared their experiences with Mahila Milan and SPARC. Then, these groups began to call themselves the Alliance (ibid).

### 3.2 Building and disseminating a counter discourse

Around 1988, the Alliance of NSDF, Mahila Milan and SPARCS began to do more networking and interact with other NGOs and some UN organisations (ibid). In the course of it, the Alliance came to realise a clear difference between its approach to poverty reduction and the approach taken by NGOs and UN organisations. While the Alliance put poor people at the centre of poverty reduction activities, the NGOs and UN organisations believed that they should plan, control and supervise poverty reduction projects (ibid). The Alliance, by contrast, began to facilitate the sharing of experiences and knowledge about how to tackle poverty between different poor communities (ibid). By the early 1990s, the Alliance became capable of building houses, borrowing money and undertaking a series of large-scale programs in collaboration with other development agencies.

With the belief that the poor know best how to survive poverty, the Alliance placed the poor at the centre of their poverty reduction initiative (Appadurai, 2001, 2004). It also advocated that in order to reduce poverty, city authorities and development agencies must take the poor's rights seriously by providing them with appropriate infrastructure through public investment (Appadurai, 2001; Patel and Mitlin, 2004). In so doing, it challenged the dominant, short-term project model of poverty reduction adopted by majority of development agencies (ibid).

The Alliance adopted two approaches to pursue its goal of poverty reduction. First of all, being aware of the material resources and political power that collective actions can bring about, the Alliance placed great importance on federating with other like-minded organisations. Its effort of federation resulted in establishing a global network, Slum Dwellers International (SDI) (ibid). Secondly, the Alliance negotiated and collaborated with a variety of governmental organisations and other

stakeholders to promote its goal. While the Alliance was open to negotiate with any potential stakeholders, it declined to affiliate with political parties because doing so could compromise its federation approach (Appadurai, 2001).

In order to attain its goal of transforming the condition of poverty by the poor themselves, the Alliance carried out several activities. One of such key activities was saving (Appadurai, 2001, 2004; Patel and Mitlin, 2004). Deeply influenced by the philosophy of the NSDF's leader, Jockin, the Alliance treated saving as if it was 'a spiritual practice' (Appadurai, 2001, p.33). For its members, saving was a moral discipline which did not generate large resources quickly but could bring about positive changes in the long run (ibid).

Another key activity of the Alliance was community exchanges which had been practised from its incipient stage (ibid). Through community exchanges, the Alliance members discussed problems in each community and shared their experiences of how to address them. Not only did this play a role of knowledge sharing, but also worked as a moral support for the members who struggled to obtain tenure land and secure housing (ibid).

Another key activity was self-surveys and self-enumeration in the informal settlements by the Alliance members (ibid). Through a series of training and practice, the members became adept in gathering reliable data about households in their own communities. This local knowledge produced by the members became a powerful tool to convince governmental organisations and multilateral development agencies of the Alliance's claim for safeguarding the poor's basic rights including their land ownership (ibid).

The other key activity of the Alliance was housing projects. At the time of Appadurai's study (2001, 2004), the Alliance undertook house upgrading, new house construction, community-managed resettlement, and construction of community toilet blocks (ibid). In case development experts were reluctant to take the claims of the Alliance seriously, the Alliance used these tangible achievements to demonstrate the feasibility of their claim – that is, the poor were capable of reducing poverty such that they should be put at the centre of development practice with the acknowledgement of their basic rights (ibid).

### 3.3 Facing obstacles, overcoming it and remaining difficulties

While successfully challenging the dominant development discourse and bringing about tangible changes to the lives of many poor people, the Alliance faced obstacles in advancing its goal. One such obstacle was the marginalised status of women in the Alliance (Patel and Mitlin, 2004). This issue originated from the fact that women had been assigned to mere supportive roles in the NSDF (ibid). NSDF leaders used women's presence for demonstrations and other activities but never treated them as being capable of becoming leaders. Thus, when the Alliance was formed among NSDF, Mahila Milan and SPARC, the representatives from Mahila

Milan were the only women attending its federation meetings. Despite their marginalised presence, the women stayed confident and shared their experiences and knowledge with men in the Alliance. Gradually, the NSDF leaders came to realise that men and women could work together to combat poverty, and women began to take key roles in the Alliance's activities (ibid).

Despite having overcome the gender issue, the Alliance continued to face some difficulties. Firstly, the power of the dominant discourse which had faith in expert-led development remained strong. As such, the value of local data produced by members of the Alliance was still not considered as legitimate by many development experts (SPARC, 2018). In the face of this, the Alliance made use of research-practice partnership with university institutions to demonstrate the value of local data to the development experts (ibid).

Secondly, due to the recent policy reform by the Indian government, the Alliance had difficulty in securing funds to finance its activities (SPARC, 2018). One such reform was the government's policy of de-monetisation (ibid). Intended as a move against the black economy, this caused considerable hardship, especially within the urban slum economy where the Alliance's members completely depended on cash transactions. The reform also incurred considerable amount of additional administrative costs on the Alliance.

Thirdly, the recent change of donors' priorities did not favour the Alliance (SPARC, 2018). The Alliance lost funds from most of its international donors who divested its funds from India. This was because these donors believed that funds for development initiatives could be and should be secured within India itself. In addition, the recent trend that most funding opportunities were open for organisations working in health, education and environment sectors further disadvantaged the Alliance (ibid). In response to this difficulty, the Alliance explored possibilities to become a recipient of environment funds (ibid). Given that the Alliance was firm about sticking to its ultimate objective of combating poverty by the poor themselves, identifying where its stand fitted in this donors' new priority was a challenge.

### 3.4 Applying the theoretical model to the pavement and slum dwellers' movement

First of all, through the lens of the model, the Alliance is seen as a manifestation of an SCP. This is because the urban poor who were previously excluded from public reasoning created their own groups and, in collaboration with a local NGO, SPARC, began to tackle the severe poverty that they faced and question the dominant exclusionary development practice led by the experts. Through a variety of activities, this SCP built and disseminated the counter discourse that pavement and slum dwellers should come at the centre of urban development planning and projects, and this required city authorities and development agencies to take their

rights seriously and to provide them with appropriate infrastructure through public investment. The model identified the SCP as a justice-promoting one because its counter discourse is conducive to social change (i.e., poverty reduction and greater inclusion in public reasoning) which better fulfils the normative criterion of equal dignity.

In this empirical context, through their coming together, discussion and a variety of activities, the SCP members (consisting of SPARC, Mahila Milan and NSDF) reached a conclusion that in order to reduce the severe poverty, the current development practice must become more inclusive by putting the poor at its centre and safeguarding their basic rights. In the terms of the model, the SCP members consensually identified the severe poverty perpetuated by the exclusionary development practice and their lack of basic rights as injustice through public reasoning.

The exploration also brought attention that in identifying the severe poverty perpetuated by the exclusionary development practice as injustice, the members of Alliance did not invoke the concept of equal dignity. Rather, it illuminated that they collectively took action to improve their immediate circumstances of severe poverty and exclusion. Nonetheless, the Alliance members utilised the concept of rights – an expression of equal dignity – in negotiating with governmental and international development agencies. Thus, the model needs to take into account the fact that – as in the case of the Egyptian campaign – the concept of equal dignity did not galvanise the people to form an SCP but served as a discursive resource for the SCP's movement.

Despite the SCP's identification of the injustice and activities to remedy it, key interlocutors did not agree with the SCP's claim to regard severe poverty and exclusion as injustice and take actions to remedy it. This is shown in the hesitance of the key stakeholders of city authorities and development agencies to acknowledge the slum dwellers' rights to land and appropriate infrastructure. Even after the decade-long contestations, the interlocutors had yet to have a shared view of how urban housing and infrastructure should be organised in a way that reflects the rights of all who live in the city. Nevertheless, the SCP continuously engaged in public reasoning on just ways of conducting urban planning. The SCP's activities gradually made the interlocutors act in support of pavement and slum dwellers' participation in urban planning and the material improvement of the urban environment. Thus, again in this empirical context, the conflictual nature of public reasoning was underscored.

The exploration also drew attention to the dynamic and complex operation of the SCP not only at the domestic level but also at the international one. First of all, the SCP's movement began to converge with other like-minded pavement and slum dwellers' movements in the global south, making the SCP's movement more powerful. In addition, the SCP came into partnership with other organisations (e.g.,

city and university institutions) in order to make its counter discourse convincing in the eye of the interlocutors sceptical of the SCP's claim. This finding resonates with Fraser's argument that inter-public coordination is key for an SCP to succeed in effectively disseminating its counter discourse. Secondly, the SCP's movement was significantly affected by the preferences of international donors which provided it with financial resources. The SCP was also influenced by the government policies which affected the flow of financial resources. While not discussed by Fraser (1990, 2008), this point – that SCPs may need resources from other organisations for its sustainable movement – appears to deserve close examination.

The exploration also underscored that the SCP members – in particular, pavement and slum dwellers – transformed themselves to be capable of building and disseminating the counter discourse by coming together with SPARC as well as through collectively discussing and engaging in the movement. Initially, they neither knew how they should negotiate with stakeholders nor what means might be effective to convince the stakeholders of their claim. Nevertheless, through collectively engaging in the movement, they became capable of handling a variety of challenges. This finding is relevant to Fraser's key argument of SCP's dual function, and in tandem with the same finding from the first case, it confirms that the relational perspective underlying the concept of SCP merits due attention in developing the model further.

The exploration also drew attention to the fact that the SCP members' *action* played an important role in the movement. Rather than focusing on crafting its counter discourse, the Alliance members primarily acted – e.g., generated local data and built houses – to reduce poverty along with demonstrating their competence to development agencies. In so doing, they gradually built the strong counter discourse that the poor know best how to reduce poverty and they need adequate public support to this end. Thus, as in the first case, going beyond its exclusive focus on discourse, the model needs to take into account the importance of action which may be vital for the success of SCPs' movement.

## 4. Conclusion

As the first part of the empirical exploration, in this chapter, I applied the theoretical model to empirical contexts in order to examine how well it fits with actual struggles for justice and gain empirical feedback from them. The exploration brought out the following three key findings which contribute to developing the model further into a useful guide for those wishing to promote justice in practice.

Firstly, the exploration underscored that in both empirical contexts, public reasoning was illuminated as a conflictual and contested process where a variety of interlocutors contest over what counts as justice and injustice. In the face of such dynamic operations of public reasoning, the value-added of the more grounded

strategy and the normative criterion in the model became evident as they helped narrow down the focus of exploration on the justice-promoting SCPs.

However, the exploration questioned the justice theorists' claim that ideal theories and principles help people criticise social reality (see Chapter 1. Section 2) and my discussion that the concept of equal dignity is invoked by many social justice struggles (see Chapter 2. Section 3). The SCP members in Egypt and India did not need the concept of equal dignity in order to mobilise against the situations where people's dignity was severely violated. Rather, they stood up to tackle their immediate problematic situations of the widespread practice of FGM and the severe urban poverty perpetuated by exclusionary development practice. It is true that the concept of equal dignity, in the expression of rights, underlay their counter discourses. Nevertheless, only after translating the everyday language used by those involved in the movements into the theoretical one used in the model, their mobilisation against the problematic situations was seen as their identification of injustice through public reasoning. Thus, the exploration drew attention to the incommensurable languages used in justice theorising and by those fighting against injustice on the ground, and pointed to the inevitability of practice-for-theory translation in giving an account of critical real-world phenomena.

Secondly, the analysis also drew attention to the complexity and relationality entailed in SCPs' operation. Particularly noteworthy is that in both empirical cases, multiple groups consisting of quite diverse people (both the marginalised and professionals) comprised an SCP. Furthermore, the operation of other governmental, non-governmental and international organisations had leverage on how the SCPs operate. This finding suggests that in exploring SCPs, it is necessary to be open for their unexpected operations which may involve a large number of people and organisations in a highly complex manner.

In addition, in both empirical cases, individuals' coming together as SCPs transformed themselves and resulted in generating trans-individual discursive forces. This finding was also brought up by Ibrahim (2014) and Appadurai (2004) as they noted that those who were previously marginalised transformed themselves through their coming together, collectively identifying their interests, needs and goals. As a critical contributor for the movements to emerge and be sustained, they also identified 'navigational capacity' which Appadurai describes as the capacity to plan a route for a goal and attempt to actualise the goal by 'being conscious of the links between a wide range of means and ends' (Appadurai, 2004, p.68). Their analysis further indicated that this 'navigational capacity' develops through these individuals' collectively acting toward their shared goals (Ibrahim, 2014; Appadurai, 2004). They also suggested that the development of this 'navigational capacity' goes in tandem with obtaining relevant knowledge because setting up a goal and choosing means for it require one to have the relevant knowledge (ibid).

Expanding beyond their analysis, this finding of collective transformation of those involved in the movements may be better understood in reference to Fraser's key argument of 'SCP's dual function' mentioned in Chapter 2. Section 4: on the one hand, an SCP works as the space of withdrawal and regroupment for those marginalised and thus they can formulate oppositional interpretations of their identities, interests and needs; on the other hand, the SCP functions as bases and training grounds for agitational activities directed toward wider publics including those in the main and official public sphere. It appears that building on the empirical finding, it is necessary for the thesis to pay attention to relational perspectives as it seeks to explore further the operation of SCPs.

Thirdly, while Fraser's theory suggests that an SCP works by generating trans-individual discursive force, the exploration of this chapter showed that its members' *actions* also played an important role in promoting its goals. It suggested that for the SCPs' campaigns to be successful, their counter discourses needed to become convincing by substantiating the feasibility of their claims by action and gaining trust from other interlocutors. In the Egyptian case, aside from launching the FGM campaign, the women campaigners acted to help solve community problems, building trust in the community, and launched the microfinance scheme for the midwives who might suffer from monetary loss by supporting the campaign. Even in the Indian case, the Alliance members continuously acted to produce local data and build houses for slum residents, making their counter discourse to put the poor at the centre of urban planning more convincing. This finding indicates that for the further development of the model, it is necessary to closely examine how important actions are for SCPs' dissemination of their counter discourse.

In identifying the three key findings of this chapter, I also need to acknowledge some caveats and limitations. Firstly, choosing cases which adopt the capability perspective, protected the model from radical questioning of its core theoretical propositions, in as much as many of these are based on the capability approach. Secondly, the small number and purposive choice of cases with certain similarities make it difficult to generalise the findings to other contexts. It is clear that fuller testing of the model requires it to be applied to a larger sample of more diverse cases, including those produced by scholars from different theoretical traditions.

As a first step toward this direction, the thesis proceeds to another empirical exploration of a justice-promoting SCP based on my own fieldwork in rural West Bengal, India. The following chapter describes the context where the fieldwork took place, and presents the methods used to collect and analyse the empirical data.

# Chapter 4　Context and methods

## 1. Introduction

In this chapter, I discuss the context where my own fieldwork took place and the methods used to collect and analyse the data. Before proceeding to the discussion, I introduce two methodological decisions to frame this primary study.

Firstly, the study started by identifying a justice-promoting SCP operating in West Bengal, India. The choice of West Bengal was a combination of reason and serendipity.　Reason-wise West Bengal was suitable as it is well-known for being a nurturing ground for social movements (Heimsath, 1962; Crusters, 1986; Shingha Roy, 1995, 2009). Regarding serendipity, I had a network with NGOs in West Bengal which I established during my work in a local NGO in the state from 2005 to 2006. Through visiting several NGOs and their operational villages, I identified a justice-promoting SCP which comprises a local NGO and two women's groups and campaigns for gender justice.

Secondly, I decided to use quite open-ended qualitative methods in order to collect in-depth data from the fieldwork and analyse the data to elucidate what factors are critical for enabling the SCP's campaign. As Chapter 3 demonstrated, SCPs operate in a highly complex and dynamic manner. In the face of this, it was necessary for the study to go beyond theoretical assumptions about SCPs and accommodate unexpected yet critical information as data. Having undertaken the first round of fieldwork from the end of November 2016 to the end of December 2016, I had come to realise the importance of data collection methods. That is, while structured interviews helped me identify a justice-promoting SCP, the method was unsuitable for collecting in-depth data about it. Based on this experience, I decided to opt for rather open-ended qualitative methods in the second round which took place from the beginning of December 2017 to the end of January 2018. As will be discussed shortly, the open-ended interviews enabled me to carefully listen to the voices of those involved in the SCP and use their insights to develop further the theoretical model.

The chapter starts by describing some demographic characteristics of West Bengal. Next, I introduce the political situation in West Bengal. As the justice-promoting SCP in question consists of rural women and a local NGO, the discussion focuses on rural women's political participation and NGOs' relationship with the state government. This is followed by the discussion on the methods used to collect data about the SCP and to analyse it. The chapter concludes with some reflections on the process of this primary study.

## 2. Context

### 2.1 Demographic characteristics of West Bengal

West Bengal is a state in the eastern part of India and adjacent to Bangladesh which

made up the eastern half of Bengal until the partition in 1947. Based on the census in 2011, the majority of the population in West Bengal are Hindu (70.5 per cent) and Muslim (27.01 per cent) while there are other religious minorities, ranging from Christian (0.72 per cent), Sikh (0.07 per cent), and Buddhist (0.31 per cent) to Jain (0.07 per cent), others (1.03 per cent) and those who do not state religious belief (0.25 per cent) (Census Population Data, 2011). As of 2011, the state has a population of 91.3 million and this is an increase from 80.2 million in the 2001 census (CensusPopulationData, 2011).

Despite the urbane, sophisticated popular image of the capital city of Kolkata, 68.13 per cent of the population live in rural areas while 31.87 per cent live in towns and cities (CensusPopulationData, 2011). From 2009 to 2010, the poverty estimate (head-count ratio) in rural West Bengal was 28.8 per cent while it was 22.0 per cent in the urban area (Drèze and Sen, 2014). The statistics further show that from 2009 to 2010, the average daily wages were 78 rupees for female casual labourers and 99 for male casual labourers in the urban area (ibid). [19] This is equivalent to 1.04 US dollars for the female casual labourers and 1.32 US dollars for the male casual labourers. In the rural area, the average daily wages were 66 rupees for female casual labourers and 88 rupees for male casual labourers (ibid). This is equivalent to 0.88 US dollars for the female casual labourers and 1.17 US dollars for the male casual labourers. The statistics show that women in both areas were paid less than their male counterparts. In 2011, in rural West Bengal, 65.5 per cent of women and 78.4 per cent of men were literate, while in the urban counterpart, 81.0 per cent of women and 88.4 per cent of men were literate (CensusPopulationData, 2011). The statistics show that not only those in the urban area fared better than their rural counterparts in terms of literacy, but also women, in general, tend to less literate than men. In rural West Bengal, approximately half of the population engage in agriculture as their main source of livelihood (CensusPopulationData, 2011).

### 2.2. Political situation in West Bengal

After India's independence from the British Empire and Partition in 1947, the West Bengal government made an attempt to improve the lives of rural people – majority of whom were sharecroppers – by the Land Reforms Act (1955) (Abhijit V. Banerjee, Gertler and Ghatak, 2002). The Land Reforms Act (1955) was intended to give sharecroppers permanent and inheritable incumbency rights to land, but due to the loopholes, it did not bring about the expected result (ibid). Its failure of uplifting the lives of the rural poor led to the Naxalbari movement which emerged with a Marxist-Leninist-Maoist ideological framework in 1967 and was eventually repressed by the national and state governments led by Indian National Congress in 1972 (Shingha Roy, 1995, 2009). Receiving massive support from the rural people

[19] The data concerns casual labourers aged 15-50 years.

who were discontented with Indian National Congress's repressive response to the Naxalbari movement, in 1977, the Left Front (LF), led by Communist Party of India (Marxist) (CPI (M)), democratically came to the power to rule West Bengal (Partha Sarathi Banerjee, 2011).

The LF government carried out two major institutional reforms which informed today's rural West Bengal. Firstly, it passed the West Bengal Land Reforms Act (1977) which closed most of the loopholes in the Land Reforms Act (1955) (Abhijit V. Banerjee, Gertler and Ghatak, 2002). Furthermore, in the same year, it implemented Operation Barga in which the so-called Operation Barga officials visited villages and aided sharecroppers in registering themselves for permanent and inheritable incumbency rights to land (Abhijit V. Banerjee, Gertler and Ghatak, 2002).[20]

Secondly and more importantly to this study, the LF government introduced a three-tiered panchayat electoral system which consists of village-level (gram panchayat), block-level (panchayat samiti) and district-level (zilla parishad) councils in 1978 (Ghatak and Ghatak, 2002). Panchayat members are elected by the rural people, and are responsible for the administration of local public goods (Chattopadhyay and Duflo, 2004). In 1992, the LF government implemented another panchayat reform in response to the 73rd Amendment to the Constitution passed by the national parliament. The amendment required that 'one-third of the seats in all panchayat councils, as well as one-third of the pradhan (chief) positions, must be reserved for women'(Chattopadhyay and Duflo, 2004, p.980). It also mandated seat reservation for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes in accordance with their proportion in each district (Chattopadhyay and Duflo, 2004).

It appears that the 34-year rule by the LF had both positive and negative impacts on the lives of rural people. Firstly, a study suggests that the land tenancy reform by the LF had gotten more than 65 per cent of sharecroppers registered by 1993 and contributed to the increased agricultural productivity in rural West Bengal (Abhijit V. Banerjee, Gertler and Ghatak, 2002). Secondly, some studies suggest that the panchayat reforms helped the government to more effectively reach rural poor beneficiaries and promoted the representation of Scheduled Castes in local politics (Webster, 1992; Ghatak and Ghatak, 2002). In addition, other studies suggest that the panchayat reforms facilitated women's participation in local politics (Chattopadhyay and Duflo, 2004; Beaman et al., 2009).

On the other hand, many scholars draw attention to problematic consequences of the LF's 34-year rule. Firstly, the LF's rule severely limited the space for NGOs to work in their own terms. Initially, CPI (M) which controlled the LF government, was completely against NGOs as they can empower and mobilise the rural poor and thus become a threat to the LF's rule (Harrison, 2017). Changing its antagonistic

[20] In Bengali, 'barga' means sharecropping.

stance towards NGOs, in the 2000s, the CPI (M) began to make use of them for the delivery of public projects approved by CPI (M)(ibid). Despite being given a space of operation, being busy with delivering government projects, NGOs became unable to tackle critical socio-cultural issues such as violence against women and child marriage which are still widespread in rural Bengal (Biswajit Ghosh, 2011; Biswajit Ghosh and Choudhuri, 2011; Sengupta and Ganguly, 2014).

Secondly, while promoting political participation of rural people, during the LF's rule, political violence became commonplace in rural West Bengal (Partha Sarathi Banerjee, 2011). It not only created a large number of uncontested seats in panchayat elections (Partha Sarathi Banerjee, 2011) but also let political thugs sexually attack women to gain support from locals (Deepshikha Ghosh, 2014; Rao, 2015; Talukdar, 2017).

Once seen as having the impregnable political regime, West Bengal underwent an important change in May 2011. That is, the rule of LF came to an end by the landslide victory of All India Trinamool Congress (TMC) and consequently, the founder and chief person of TMC, Mamata Banerjee became the first woman to serve as the Chief Minister of West Bengal (West Bengal Government, 2020b). As in the LF's seizing power in 1977, TMC's victory was attributed to rural people's support which was gained through Mamata Banerjee's being part of the anti-land confiscation movement led by farmers in Singur (Anirban Roy, 2011; Das, 2016).[21]

Since TMC became the ruling party, the West Bengal government has launched some important programs for rural people, in particular, for rural women. Firstly, in 2012, Anondodhara was launched with the object of improving the livelihood of rural people (West Bengal Government, 2020a). It provides rural people with professional training, agricultural support, and access to financial products (in the form of microcredit and saving) (ibid).

Secondly, in 2014, as one of Mamata Banerjee's flagship programs, Kanyashree Prakalpa was launched with the object of combatting child marriage and promoting girls' education(West Bengal Government, 2020c). This conditional cash transfer scheme gives the annual scholarship of Rs. 1000 to girls whose ages are 13 to 18 if they continue to study and remain unmarried. In addition, it gives a one-time grant of Rs. 25,000 when girls turn 18 years old, provided that they are engaged in studies and remain unmarried.

In this context, the fieldwork was carried out to collect data from the justice-

[21] This so-called anti-land confiscation movement originated from Singur where the LF government acquired 997 acres of agricultural land for building TATA Motors' car manufacturing factories in the early 2006. Since May 2006, farmers had protested against the LF government, demanding to return 400 acres of land that belonged to the farmers who refused to part with their land. While the construction of the factories continued until the middle of 2008, the protest spearheaded by Mamata Banerjee in August 2008 pressurised the LF government to stop the construction. By the beginning of October 2008, TATA Motors cancelled its plan to build the factories in Singur (Das, 2016).

promoting SCP.

## 3. Methods

Having sketched out the context, I now discuss the methods used to collect data in the fieldwork and analyse it. I begin with discussing the first round of fieldwork.

### 3.1 The first round of fieldwork

The first round of fieldwork took place for a month from the end of November 2016 to the end of December 2016. The primary objective of the fieldwork was to identify a justice-promoting SCP. The fieldwork also aimed at testing some data collection methods and identifying suitable ones for the second round of fieldwork, the goal of which was to collect in-depth data on a justice-promoting SCP.

In planning the fieldwork, I deconstructed the concept of an SCP in the light of the findings from Chapter 3: i.e., a group of marginalised people who are acting collectively, a local NGO supporting them, radical messages which challenge oppressive dominant discourses. While inadvertently making the rich concept of SCP simplified, the strategy turned out to be useful for identifying a justice-promoting SCP in West Bengal by allowing me to take a step-by-step approach.

As the first step, I decided to look for a group of marginalised people who are doing some collective activities. By utilising my network with NGO staff in West Bengal, I discussed with them whether they happen to know relevant NGOs to my study and in case they know, I asked them to help me gain access to the NGOs and their project sites. Secondly, as I am not well-versed in Bengali – the main language used in West Bengal – I hired translators who are bilingual in Bengali and English. I recruited local university students and they aided my communication with locals through on-the-spot translation as well as document translation. Thirdly, in the light of the information obtained from my network, I visited all the potential study sites: the office and operational village of SVS in Champ; the office of JDS and two of its operational villages Amtal and Dulak; one of BDC's operational village, Sarp; and two slums in Ultag in the city of Kolkata where WDV used to carry out an income generation project.[22]

At each site, except for the Ultag slums where there was no longer any active programme, I firstly interviewed NGO staff who were willing to talk with me in an informal manner. This gave me information about how their projects had helped marginalised people come together to do collective activities and whether any radical messages are submerged in their discourse. Secondly, I asked the NGO staff to let me interact with locals who are involved in their projects. As for the Ultag slums, I asked one of my translators to contact a resident and the resident introduced me to the locals. Then, I took walks with these local people to gain a sense of their

[22] I anonymise the NGOs, study sites and groups in consideration of potential harm and inconvenience that the publication of this thesis may cause to them.

community. Thirdly, I carried out 5 structured interviews at SVS office (N=5), 4 FGDs in JDS's operational villages (N=32), 5 structured interviews in BDC's operational village (N=5) and 5 structured interviews in Ultag slums (N=5). The respondents were chosen by the NGO staff in the three sites and by my translator in the Ultag slums. This approach may have led to selection bias in choosing people who would give a positive account of the NGOs. However, I had to rely on these gatekeepers because as a non-Bengali researcher and outsider, it was impossible to select and approach interviewees at my own discretion. The interviews concentrated on asking the most pressing problems in the community or village, how the people handle these problems, and their group membership, their aspirations and what good life means for them. In addition to the formal interviews, I also tried to chat with them in an informal manner to elicit relevant information. In commencing the interviews and FGDs, I explained the purpose of the research and answered any questions raised by the interviewees. I also clarified that answering my questions will not lead to any financial benefits or their access to government scheme. It was only after this that I sought permission to start an interview or an FGD. As the interviewees and discussants were wary of signing documents, I did not insist that they should sign a consent form, but opted for gaining consent verbally.

Through the first round of fieldwork, I came to learn that JDS together with two rural women's groups, AB and CD, launch a movement to promote gender equality in rural West Bengal. This was confirmed by two informational sources. Firstly, the interviews with JDS staff and my consultation with documents issued by JDS showed that JDS carries out campaigns which aim to transform the oppressive situation to women in the region in collaboration with AB and CD. The data further revealed that with the support from JDS, AB works to help victims of physical and sexual violence while CD visits villages to deliver messages against child marriage and for promoting girls' education. Secondly, my informal conversation with a discussant who came to talk to me after an FGD in Amtal confirmed the above information. She told me that she campaigns against child marriage as a CD member and through the workshop and training offered by JDS, she was empowered. Thus, I identified this gender movement as a justice-promoting SCP and decided to choose the movement as my primary case to be further explored in the second round of fieldwork.

### 3.2 Reflection on the first round of fieldwork

I conclude this section by reflecting on my case selection and the methods used in the first round of fieldwork. Firstly, choosing this gender movement as the case of my primary study has both strengths and limitations. A key strength is its political nature, being aimed at achieving a public good and thus a clear-cut case of a justice promoting SCP. As the other NGOs and their local groups predominantly engage in income generation activities, choosing them was not expected to lead to elucidating

how a justice-promoting SCP invigorates public reasoning. As I analysed the transcripts, it also became clear that those involved in these initiatives talked about changes in the economic dimension of their own lives (e.g., the income growth helped them to pay bills) rather than any wider social impact. By contrast, those involved in and/or affected by the gender movement talked about changes in terms of what was involved in questioning gendered social norms in their community (e.g., they came to be able to form independent opinions, they came to understand the importance of making their own decisions and taking action). Thus, focusing on the gender movement was expected to elucidate how a justice-promoting SCP invigorates public reasoning.

The second strength is that JDS, as a gatekeeper, let me collect data more freely from group members and other villagers. In the first round of fieldwork, JDS allowed me to visit a few of their operational villages with a SW microfinance loan officer (i.e., a local woman) and allowed me to freely hold FGDs. Even in the JDS office, I was able to talk with freely with JDS staff members. By contrast, senior staff of the other NGOs tended to impose control on my choice of interviewees. They often insisted to be present in the interviews and made comments on the interviewees' response even as the conversation was ongoing. This said, the JDS director did not allow me to approach a former JDS senior staff member who played a critical role in helping local women form CD because the staff left JDS 'under unpleasant circumstances'. Also, as will be discussed shortly, my close relationship with the director might have brought some biases in the data generated.

Despite these strengths, an obvious limitation is the small size of the gender movement and the small number of people involved in it. Because of this, it is possible that the findings from this movement may be specific to small, face to face mobilisations, and may not hold for other larger movements. In addition, the operational area of the movement is limited to a district of West Bengal and the city of Kolkata. This suggests that the findings may be specific to these locations which have certain cultural characteristics. There is also a concern about the movement's sustainability because of its being tiny despite its having been operational for 27 years. As discussed in Chapter 3, for an SCP to help contribute to justice-promoting changes, it takes a very long time. Therefore, if the movement is not sustainable in the long term, the findings from it may only have limited value.

The first round of fieldwork also made me reconsider the methods to be used for the second round of the fieldwork. While observation turned out to be useful in understanding the context where people are embedded, it became evident that structured interviews would be unsuitable for collecting in-depth data on an SCP. For the first round of fieldwork to identify an SCP, I used structured interviews as a handy method to collect data from a large number of people in a short period of time. Despite giving me a wide range of information, the method did not let people digress from the given questions and limited the scope of obtaining in-depth

information about them and their communities. As shown by the example of a CD member above, when I let people talk in their own terms I was able to collect a wider range of critical data. Thus, the lesson from the first round not only affirmed my plan to use semi-structured interviews for the second round of fieldwork but also encouraged me to opt for a quite open-ended, narrative style of semi-structured interviews.

### 3.3 The second round of fieldwork

The second round of fieldwork took place for two months from the beginning of December 2017 to the end of January 2018. Its objective was to collect in-depth data on how the justice-promoting SCP works and what enables the SCP's campaign. To this end, I used the following qualitative data collection methods.

#### 3.3.1 Data collection methods

As the primary method, I chose a quite open-ended, narrative style of semi-structure interviews. The semi-structured interviews were guided by an interview schedule. This consisted of several key topics (e.g., the history of the SCP, its activities, allies and obstacles) to be covered in the interviews and the opening questions which were supposed to elicit the information about the topics. While I asked the opening questions with the help of a translator, the interviewees were the ones who took the conversation in their own direction and were free to digress when they felt like doing so. The interview schedule also had a demographic survey section concerning the age, group membership educational attainment, marital status and religion of the interviewees.

This primary method of semi-structured interviews was followed with a relational map drawing by the interviewees. In this method, the interviewees were given paper and several coloured pens and asked to draw important relations for them. Aside from this direction, they were free to draw any relations, not confined to interpersonal relations related to the SCP. As I was interested in how they have come together and formed the SCP, I used this method which would let the interviewees more openly express themselves in a non-verbal form.

In addition, observation was used to complement the data collected through the semi-structured interviews and relational map drawing. I observed the contexts where the interview took place and took note of any information which may have affected the answer of the interviewees. Later, the information was put into the interview transcript as observation notes. In addition, I observed the SCP's campaigns directed toward wider publics in villages as well as in the city of Kolkata, and the SCP's daily activities such as talking with victims of violence. The data was recorded in my observational notebook which was later used to help my analysis of the interview and mapping data.

I chose these qualitative methods for two reasons. Firstly, these qualitative

methods were expected to allow me to listen to the interviewees empathetically and establish good relationships with them – which are critical for obtaining quality data. In the first round of fieldwork, I became alert that the quality of data was undermined by my controlling the structured interviews and often making the interviewees nervous. Having learnt from this, I concurred with the argument by Jha (2018) that for quality data, researchers should treat people as active subjects and listen to them with respect, establishing good research relations with them.

Secondly, as discussed in Chapter 1, for social justice research to be conducive to promoting justice on the ground, it ultimately needs to become a joint project between the researcher and those involved in the justice-promoting struggle. Admittedly, I was neither able to completely share the objective of the thesis with the SCP members nor be part of it. Nevertheless, in order to get closer to this ideal of having a joint project, the principle used in the fieldwork was to *gain feedback from those fighting against injustice on the model*. That is, the principle was to carefully listen to the voices of those fighting against gender injustice and not to impose my theoretical propositions on them. By so doing, I tried to develop the model in such a way that it will eventually help justice-promoting SCPs' – including this West Bengal SCP – fight against injustice. As such, the quite-open ended narrative style of interviews coupled with the relational map drawing were suitable as they foreground the voices of people, constructing them as active subjects and highlighting their parts in the production of knowledge (Kanbur & Shaffer, 2007, Narayan, 1993, White & Jha, 2014 cited by Jha, 2018, p. 74).

### 3.3.2 Data collection process and ethical considerations

The data collection started with recruiting translators as I was not well-versed in Bengali. As discussed above, for this round of fieldwork, I tried my best to establish good research relationships with the interviews. Thus, I recruited Bengali-English bilinguals not only with knowledge about gender, but also with good communication skill and capacity to treat interviewees with respect and care. I eventually recruited three female university students living in the city of Kolkata.

Next, I made the aforementioned interview schedule for the semi-structured interviews and relational map drawing. The interview schedule was translated into Bengali with the help of the translators. Therein, we discussed how key words (e.g., journey, obstacles, and allies) in the open-up questions could be appropriately translated into Bengali and whether the questions were phrased in an accessible way to the interviewees. We also did mock interviews, discussing whether the order of the questions could be changed or some questions could be merged for simplicity. I revised the interview schedule a few times in response to the reaction of the interviewees because even after the careful formulation of the questions, the meaning of some of the questions was not very clear for the interviewees, in particular, AB and CD members.

I then attended the fortnight anti-violence campaign and blood donation camp jointly organised by JDS, AB and CD to observe how the SCP carried out the campaigns for a wider audience and to get acquainted with the SCP members. Throughout, I was accompanied by a translator who translated Bengali into English and explained contextual information to me. As she was not from the community, at times, some of my questions (e.g., why did the lady on the stage say 'everyone knows me in this community'?) remained unanswered. On those occasions, we asked JDS staff in charge of the events for further information. It also often happened that due to my foreign appearance, some JDS staff and AB and CD members came to talk to me during the events for chitchats. In such cases, I did my best to get acquainted with them, listening to them with respect and asking and memorising their names. Later, we also attended monthly meetings of AB and CD where they, together with a few JDS staff members, discussed the strategy for their activities. Observing the meetings gave more information about how the SCP operates – e.g. what kind of organisations the SCP were in touch and what kind of issues they were dealing with. It became a good opportunity for us to establish good relationships with many of the SCP members.

Once good research relationships were in place, we began to approach interviewees. We began the interview by explaining the purpose of the research to the interviewees and answering any questions raised by them. We also clarified that taking part in the interview will neither lead to any financial benefits nor their access to governmental and international development programs. We also explained to them that the information given to us will not be shared with others and if I report on anything they would tell me, I will anonymise them. This was followed by the explanation that they have the right to withdraw from the interview any time. It was only after this, that we sought permission to start the interview and to use a recorder. As the interviewees were wary of signing documents, we did not insist them to sign in a written form. Rather, we opted for gaining consent verbally by the recorder as this did not make them uncomfortable.

In the interviews, aside from empathetically listening to their voices, we paid attention to the interviewee's feelings. For instance, the survey questions – which were concerned with their age and educational attainment – were initially asked at the beginning of each interview. However, this strategy made the interviewees nervous, negatively affecting the relationship with us and hindering them from speaking in their own terms. Thus, we soon decided to ask the survey questions in a natural way when the interviewees talked about their campaign. In other instances, some CD members looked nervous at the beginning of the interview for unknown reasons. Thus, instead of directly asking open-up questions about the SCP's campaign, we began with having a bit of chit chats about food or clothes or saying banters about Japanese culture. This helped the interviewees relax and speak in their own terms. In addition, due to the nature of the SCP's campaign – fighting for

gender justice, tackling violence against women and girls and child marriage – the interviewees' talking about their experiences inevitably included disturbing accounts. Thus, occasionally, the interviewees themselves began to cry. In such cases, we did not press them to continue but took a break until they felt better. We continued the interviews only when they were happy to talk more. For privacy concerns, the interviews followed by map drawing were administered individually. Aside from the one-on-one interviews, there were some occasions where the informants preferred to talk in group. In such instances, additional FGDs with the same interview schedule were carried out.

### 3.3.3 Sampling

In the second round of fieldwork, I tried to interview three categories of people: SCP core members; those who are less involved in the SCP; villagers who have no involvement in the SCP. The first category of informants consist of JDS staff (N=16 out of 17), AB members (N=10 out of 15) and CD members (N=8 out of 10). Having analysed JDS's documents, it became clear that the SCP not only consists of the three core groups but also work with a large number of organisations and people. Thus, firstly, I interviewed those with more experience and deep knowledge about the SCP so as to have a better grasp of it. These key informants include JDS senior staff and the founding members of AB who have engaged in the SCP's activities since the early 1990s as well as a few key CD members who, together with JDS staff, coordinate activities for teenage girls. This was followed by my interviewing other AB and CD members, including those who have recently joined the groups and some who have re-joined the group after having earlier left them.

The second category of informants are those who are less involved in the movement than its core group members. This category of people occasionally come to help and/or observe the campaigns of the SCP while they do not engage in its activities on a daily basis as the core members do. The informants are staff members and beneficiaries of a microfinance institution SW (N=5), local men involved in JDS's Men's Engagement Program (N=3), local women who are involved in JDS's agricultural program and income generation program (N=4), teenage girls who are involved in CD's and JDS's initiatives (N=5) and a former JDS staff member (N=1).[23] The interviews with them aimed at further elucidating the complex operation of the SCP and the kinds of changes that they may have experienced by being in touch with the SCP.

The third category of informants are those who are not involved in the SCP at all. The aim of interviewing them was to know their potentially different perspectives on the SCP. As will be discussed shortly, we were discouraged from going to villages to conduct interviews (see Section 3.3.4) by the SCP members.

[23] SW is a member governed microfinance institution which has become independent from JDS in 2009. It is still affiliated with JDS.

Thus, interviewing this category of informants was a challenge. That said, when we had a chance to go to villages to see events organised by the SCP, we randomly asked villagers whom we met whether they would be open to talking to us. In this way we managed to talk to middle-aged men (N=3), a boy (N=1), and middle-aged women (N=6). It should be noted that these informants are not representative of the wider population. The fact that they attended SCP events suggested that they were likely to be sympathetic to them, or at least open-minded. They were also people who had the freedom to come out of their homes, roam around the village, and/or were happy to talk with a foreign researcher. Thus, it is likely that these villagers were more and less critical of the SCP.

Admittedly a serious limitation of this sample is the underrepresentation of outsiders, who may have very different perspectives on the SCP. Ideally, we should have interviewed more diverse informants of this category such as villagers who even did not come to see the events, members of the families of AB and CD members, and former SCP members who had completely left the SCP. The data generated with these villagers could have significantly enriched my discussion of the achievements of the SCP in Chapter 5 with their more neutral or critical views on it. Interviews with the family could have brought out information which challenge or complement the claim of some AB and CD members that their family had itself been transformed. Interviews with former SCP members – both being familiar with and can be critical of the SCP – could have significantly enriched my account of the SCP's journey in Chapter 5 which may have been a far more complex road than the current members described.

### 3.3.4 Principles and challenges in generating quality data

There are three principles which we tried to abide by in generating quality data. Firstly, as the location where interviews take place affects interviewees' response (Elwood and Martin, 2004; Oltmann, 2016), we tried to conduct the interviews in a quiet and private location. Regarding AB and CD members, in many cases, the interviews were carried out in a vacant room or outer corridor or outside sidewalks of the office building of SW. On other occasions, the interviews were carried out in the office space of AB in the SW building where some other SW and JDS staff worked. Thus, admittedly, on the latter occasions, the spaces used for the interviews were not private and the interviewees from AB and CD may have felt some pressure to talk in favour of the SCP. Regarding JDS staff, we carried out the interviews in their own offices as they requested it. Even though the interview spaces were quiet and convenient for them, the spaces were often next to the rooms of other JDS staff. Thus, the choice of the interview space could have encouraged them to talk more positively and suppress any criticisms they may have felt of JDS or the movement more generally.

Initially, we attempted to interview AB and CD members somewhere far from

the SW and JDS buildings such as in the villages where AB and CD members lived or cafeterias. However, AB and CD members told us that it was not convenient. We guessed that probably, inviting a foreigner to their home or village was not welcome by their family or they were busy with fulfilling household duties once they were back home. Our plan to go to AB and CD members' home villages was also discouraged by JDS staff who warned that it is not safe for us – foreign and urban Bengali women – to go to their villages as cases of sexual violence still happen. Therefore, we did not persist to interview them outside far away from the SW and JDS office buildings because doing so could make the SCP members uncomfortable and damage our relationships with them. Similarly, in interviewing those who are less involved in the SCP, we tried to conduct the interviews in a quiet and private location. When they came to visit JDS or SW buildings, we used a vacant room or outer corridor. For villagers whom we met in the SCP's events, the interviews took place outside such as a pavement relatively far from other people and the events. That said, as the interviews were not scheduled in advance, we were often unsuccessful in securing quiet and private locations for the interviews.

Secondly, as implied above, our strategy to establish good research relationships with those involved in the SCP turned out to have pros and cons. On the one hand, good relationships led many interviewees to open up, talking about personal experiences and limitations of the SCP. On the other hand, my good relationship with senior JDS staff including the director of JDS may have affected the information obtained from AB and CD members who receive financial support from JDS. In particular, less experienced and younger CD members may have been less critical of the SCP because of this. In addition, having good relationships with the SCP members, I came to find it difficult to ask them sensitive requests such as whether it is possible to interview people who left the SCP and to repeatedly ask them whether we can go to villages for interviews despite their having mentioned risks.

Thirdly, we tried to let the interviewees talk freely and avoid imposing my theoretical assumptions on them. Because of this principle, we developed and used an interview schedule with open-up questions without using any theoretical concepts such as human rights and patriarchy. I was aware that referring to these concepts may end up encouraging interviewees to talk in a way that meets my theoretical assumptions. Despite our efforts, however, it is possible that we inadvertently gave positive response – e.g., smiles and nods – to the interviewees when they used these key concepts on their own. Thus, I cannot deny the possibility that the data contains biases in favour of my theoretical assumptions as well as the stories that I hoped to hear – i.e., the SCP members have stood up against gender injustice and even reduced it.

### 3.4 Translation and transcription

Next, as the first step to analyse the collected data, all the verbal data was transcribed into written form. While I transcribed English interviews, as I am not well-versed in Bengali, the translators transcribed and translated Bengali interviews into English. The principle for producing transcripts was to make a verbatim account of all verbal utterances and some nonverbal utterances, such as laughter in order to retain the original nature of the data. Complete transcripts describe the entire process from beginning to end, including observations recorded during and after the interview and photos of relational maps drawn by the interviewees. The translation from Bengali to English was checked by other translators whom I later recruited for accuracy check. The final product in English took the form of Microsoft Word files and this was imported into NVivo, computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software.

### 3.5 Data analysis

In analysing the data, I used thematic analysis (TA). TA is a method for identifying and analysing patterns in qualitative data (Braun and Clarke, 2006; Clarke and Braun, 2013). TA is known for the following advantages: 1) It works with a wide range of research questions, including those dealing with the construction of complex real-world phenomena; 2) It is suitable both for data- and theory-driven analysis; and 3) It allows for reworking theoretical concepts through nuanced interpretations of data (Braun and Clarke, 2006; Clarke and Braun, 2013). Given that the objective of my primary study was to gain an in-depth understanding of the SCP expanding beyond Fraser's broad conceptualisation, TA was particularly suitable for analysing the data obtained through the fieldwork.

Before proceeding to discuss the process of data analysis, I would like to make explicit my stand to analyse the data. Braun and Clarke (2006), renowned scholars of TA, advocate that researchers should acknowledge their own theoretical positions and values and make their value judgements explicit since such transparency will allow readers to evaluate the quality of the research (Braun and Clarke, 2006; Clarke and Braun, 2013). They argue that often, readers are not informed of how the researcher analysed the data, or what assumptions informed the analysis (ibid). They further point out that the misleading language of 'themes emerging' is often used in TA, a phrase that elides the active role the researcher plays in identifying patterns or themes, selecting which are of interest and reporting them to the readers (ibid).

In response to the call to be explicit about value judgements, I lay out my answers to the following key questions about data analysis (ibid): 1) what counts as a theme, 2) whether the TA of this research will be inductive or theoretical, and 3) whether the TA of this research will focus on semantic or latent themes.

Firstly, this study uses two criteria for defining themes: their pertinence to the question of how the SCP works, and their prevalence across the data set, in terms

of number of speakers who articulated them.

Secondly, the TA of this study stood in between theoretical thematic analysis and inductive analysis. The theoretical TA tends to be driven by the researcher's theoretical interest in the area and is thus more explicitly analytical. The inductive analysis, on the other hand, is driven by rather open-mindedness without trying to fit the data into a pre-existing theoretical frame or the researcher's analytic preconceptions. As the objective of this study was to gain an in-depth understanding of the West Bengal SCP, it was necessary to put its focus on the areas of the data related to the SCP conceptualised by Fraser (1999) and the findings from Chapter 3. Nonetheless, it was equally important to keep myself open to the data by minimising my preconception of the concept, as SCPs tend to operate in a highly complex and unpredictable manner as implied in Chapter 3.

Thirdly, the TA of this study focused both the semantic/explicit and latent/interpretative levels of the data. According to Braun and Clarke (2006), in the semantic/explicit level of data interpretation, an analyst is not looking for anything beyond what a participant has said. On the other hand, in the latent/interpretative level of data interpretation, an analyst examines the underlying ideas and assumptions that are shaping the data (ibid). Given that the objective of this study was to gain an in-depth understanding of the West Bengal SCP which is a tangible collective entity, focusing on the semantic/explicit level of the data was sensible. Nonetheless, the SCP consists of a group of *people* who may be engaging in the campaign with conflicting emotions and thus, I explored the latent/interpretative level of data when necessary. For instance, I interpreted a remark by a rural woman 'we used to go from village to village and at that time the (JDS) office did not pay us a single rupee. No matter how far we have come, it is because of our hard work' in two ways. Firstly, paying attention to the semantic/explicit level, I interpreted her remark as indicating that these rural women who worked without any financial support from JDS contributed to the emergence of the SCP. Secondly, examining the latent/interpretative level, I also interpreted her remark as the expression of her agency – the ability to pursue goals – and as the denial of JDS's control over their action.

I next turn to discussing the process of my analysing the data collected through the fieldwork. For this, I followed the six phases of TA proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006, pp.92-124). In the first phase, the researcher has to immerse herself in the data and become familiar with it. As such, I began by reading all the transcripts to get a sense of how the SCP works, listening to the audio recordings. I also carefully read documents produced by JDS to familiarise myself with the journey of the SCP.

The second phase is coding which is the generation of pithy labels for important features of the data relevant to the research questions. I began this phase by breaking down the broad question of 'how the SCP works' into two to guide my reading of

the data: 1) who are involved in the SCP and how, and 2) what has made an individual part of the SCP. The former question gave me a macro perspective which helped me analyse the complex operation of the SCP and identify other organisations and people who have been influencing it. The latter question provided me with a micro perspective from which I was able to analyse critical factors which have made individuals the members of the SCP. At this juncture, I started coding interviews with NVivo.

In the third phase, the researcher searches for themes, which can be defined as 'coherent and meaningful pattern[s] in the data relevant to the research questions' (Braun and Clarke, 2006, p.96). In this phase, I reflected on how the coded information fits vertically, i.e., within an individual's narrative, and also laterally, i.e., with others' narratives about the same things. In so doing, I began to identify consensus among the interviewees about who have been involved in this SCP and whether they have influenced the operation of this SCP negatively or positively. I also began to identify a set of experiences which have transformed individuals into SCP members.

In the fourth phase, themes are reviewed so as to ensure that they work in relation to both the coded extracts and the full data set. In this phase, I examined whether the themes tell convincing and compelling stories of who have been involved in the SCP and how, and what has made an individual part of the SCP. In addition, I also began to figure out the nature of each theme and the relationship between the themes by drawing thematic maps.

In the fifth phase, themes are fully conceptualised. For this, the researcher identifies the essence of each theme and gives it concise, punchy and informative names. In this phase, I referred back to the theoretical arguments in Chapter 2 and empirical findings from Chapter 3. In case the concepts discussed in these chapters were useful for making the stories about this SCP, I adopted them as themes.

Lastly, in the sixth phase of writing up, the researcher brings together the analytic narratives and vivid data extracts in order to tell readers a coherent and persuasive stories about the data. In this phase, I contextualised the stories in relation to my arguments in Chapters 2 and 3. By so doing, I theorised how this SCP works and how this SCP has emerged through quite a diverse people's coming together. These theoretical accounts comprise Chapters 5 and 6.

## 4. Reflections and conclusion

This chapter has documented the process of my primary study in rural West Bengal. It started with describing the context where the fieldwork took place. This was followed by the discussion of methods used for collecting data in the fieldwork and analysing it. I would like to conclude this chapter with reflecting on four points.

Firstly, I acknowledge that even though the data that will be presented in Chapters 5 and 6 is authentic, it is so in the sense of being accurate reproductions

of what I asked people, whom I spoke to, and what they replied. That is, I admit that the issues of recall reliability and post-hoc rationalisation may have affected the data provided by the interviewees. For instance, the history of this SCP dates back to the early 1990s – which is 27 years ago. Thus, it is possible that interviewees could not accurately recall the details of some incidents important for the SCP. The other issue of post-hoc rationalisation refers the interviewee's rationalising their past actions with their current reasoning style. In the field work, there was a SCP member who told me that she was deeply concerned about the oppression of women 30 years ago and acted to help victims of violence with the sense of righteous indignation. Despite her claim, there is a likelihood that in telling this story to me, she may have rationalised her past actions with her current progressive reasoning.

Secondly, it is important to admit that people, in general, tend to exaggerate their agency and see themselves as agents who can make their own decisions (Mahony, 2018). Thus, it is likely that the informants told me accounts which highlight their agency while avoiding those which draw attention to their passivity. In addition, researchers wishing to see evidence of empowerment tend to exaggerate people's agency, seeing them as agents of their own destiny (ibid). Thus, despite my efforts to be reflective throughout the research, the data I generated and accounts I present may involve some biases in favour of highlighting their agency to reduce injustice.

Thirdly, there are clearly limitations in the generalisability of findings from a single case as each movement is significantly informed by the cultural and geographical context where it is embedded. For the model to be developed with wider applicability, it needs to be applied to a larger sample of more diverse cases. Thus, along with the exploration of the two secondary cases in Chapter 3, the exploration of the gender movement should be seen as a small yet important step toward developing such a model.

Fourthly, throughout the fieldwork, the importance of research relationships with interviewees became prominent. In the first round of fieldwork the primary object of which was to identify a justice-promoting SCP, I used observation, information interviews and structured interviews. While having attained the objective in the short period of time, it stopped short of my establishing good research relationships with the interviewees. Realising the indispensability of good relationships for collecting in-depth quality data, I adopted quite open-ended narrative style of semi-structured interviews and relational map drawing as the primary methods of data collection in the second round.

Reflecting on the second round, in my view, good research relationships with the interviewees were successfully established and they appeared to have resulted in quality data with quite a lot of unexpected information to challenge my theoretical assumptions. While it is an exaggeration to call my fieldwork to be 'a joint project between the researcher and those involved in the justice-promoting

struggle' as discussed in Chapter 1, I felt that this fieldwork became a small yet critical step to moving social justice research toward this direction.

Having laid out the context and methods of my primary study in West Bengal, I will present my theoretical accounts of the West Bengal SCP in the next two chapters. Chapter 5 discusses the complexity of this SCP focusing on who have been involved in this SCP and how, and Chapter 6 illuminates how this SCP has emerged through a quite diverse people's coming together.

# Chapter 5 Empirical exploration of an SCP in West Bengal I

## 1. Introduction

The discussion in Chapter 3 suggested that SCPs tend to operate in a highly complex manner, involving a variety of people and organisations. Thus, with data collected through the fieldwork in West Bengal, this chapter explores the SCP fighting against gender injustice, illuminating *who have been involved in it and how*.

To this end, the chapter is structured as follows. Firstly, it starts by illustrating the journey of the SCP over the past 26 years. Secondly, it explores the activities of the three groups comprising the SCP – AB, CD and JDS – one by one.[24] Thirdly, it reflects on the achievements of the SCP's campaign against gender injustice in the region. Finally, it concludes by discussing the complexity entailed in this SCP's operation.

## 2. The journey of the SCP

In 1987, RJ, a staff member of a mill cooperative came to the Shakti area, West Bengal. RJ had been given the task by his employer to provide local women and the youth with livelihoods. To this end, RJ focused on generating supplementary income for them by means of embroidery which local women were familiar with, and poultry farming for which there was a market nearby. Learning that women's access to credit was a big issue, RJ also launched a microfinance program. In 1994, JDS was set up as an NGO by RJ and his colleagues. Once JDS began to expand its operation, RJ realised that livelihood programs alone were insufficient to bring about positive changes in women's lives:

*The whole series of things – child marriage, violence, safety in the public spaces, access to mobility, access to education – what was needed was the mind-set change. (RJ, the Director of JDS)*

RJ was not the only one who identified the situation surrounding women and youth as problematic. In the early 1990s, some rural women also felt the need for change and acted of their own accord. One of such women is SS who lives in Shakti. SS previously worked for an NGO and came to Shakti after marriage; her husband was also an NGO worker. After coming to Shakti, SS witnessed the oppressive situation of women and youth and decided to do something about it:

*After I came here, in the Shakti region…I saw little girls married off. After that, I used to run a school for free. I used to teach all the children of the village. In my*

[24] In this and the following chapters, I anonymise SCP members and other informants, in consideration of potential harm and inconvenience that the publication of this thesis may cause to them.

*home, I made a good school...All the children who are dropouts, they don't know 1, 2, so I taught them and got things written and admitted them to a school. I continued to do like this, then…I got a call from the Panchayat to come and work for them. I worked on literacy programs, without being paid, absolutely for free. (SS, an AB member)*

While conducting the literacy programs, a female JDS staff member contacted SS, asking her whether microfinance groups for women could be formed in Shakti. In the face of the widespread violence against and oppression of women, RJ was sceptical of this possibility. However, SS adamantly told him that she would form a group in Shakti, but the process of doing so was not easy because women were excluded from decision making, their mobility was severely restricted and violence against them was rampant:

*At first, in the Shakti region, 15 groups were formed with 10 members in each group... In the village, the husbands did not use to send their wives to us, to the microfinance group. We used to go and explain why (belonging to the microfinance group has benefits for them). In this way, I struggled a lot. After the struggle, at that time, there was utter disorder…we used to come and inform (JDS) didis that in this way the women were beaten so badly. We didn't know how to handle it. (SS, an AB member)*[25]

Around the same time, another woman MN, who was brought up in a well-off family, came to Kamna after marrying a man in the village in opposition to her parents' will. MN found the oppressive situation of women in the village problematic and began to take action to change the situation on her own:

*Most of the people in the village were uneducated. Every man drank alcohol. After that, they used to beat women and do lot of violence against them. These things used to make me very angry. I used to ask my husband, 'I will go, I will go there'. (My husband said) 'You are a new bride. You just got married. If you go out and talk with them, won't it look bad?' After that, I had one child. Then, I did not use to sit back at home. After that, I used to roam around in all neighbourhoods, find out who is beating whom, who is unable to study, and who is sick. (MN, an AB member)*

Later on, when JDS launched its microfinance program in Kamna, MN got involved in forming JDS's microfinance groups for women in the village. Due to the widespread alcoholism, exclusion of women from decision making and violence against them, MN had difficulty in forming microfinance groups:

[25] Didi is translated as older sister or older female cousin in English and is a respectful form to address to any older woman familiar with the speaker.

*Nobody wanted to give 10 rupees (to JDS's microfinance group). If someone talked about it, her husband would shout at her – 'you want to make a passbook?!' Then, the husbands used to beat the women. However, in between the husbands went out, I used to go to their home. When no one was there, I used to go. I used to go in the afternoon. In this way, it went on and on. Since 1990, with 10 rupees, we have made our passbooks. (MN, an AB member)*

While they succeeded in forming microfinance groups, the oppressive situation of women remained unchanged. MN encouraged the village women to raise their voice and report violence to police but this strategy had a limitation:

*The women told me, 'Didi, we will not go to the police station. If we do so, we will be killed'. Then, I said 'what kind of things you are saying?! They will beat you, and you will not raise your voice?!' The husbands used to beat the women more (when the women tried to report the violence)…I went to the IC (inspector commissioner/police). Then, the IC came and arrested the husbands. Frequently, they fought and the fight was so severe that they made the women victims bleed. (MN, an AB member)*

In the face of the oppressive situation of women in their villages, both SS and MN informed JDS office of the issue. In response, in 2002, JDS asked an experienced feminist trainer, MCR, to organise Rapid Response Training to equip village women with counselling skills and legal knowledge to deal with survivors of violence. SB who resides in Adhikapur and was involved in JDS's microfinance groups remembers the day when she was invited to join the first round of Rapid Response Training:

*One day, I was returning home from JDS office…There was MH di.*[26] *She said 'SB di, get up and come here. …So, you will come (to JDS) from this date onwards. You will be trained here.'…What shall I say, in the (training) room, there was no space for all the girls and boys to sit down. (SB, an AB member)*

After undergoing the first round of Rapid Response Training, the rural women formed a group to tackle violence against women and girls in their localities. Soon after the women's group was formed, the first case of violence came from Kamna where MN resides. A woman named RM had been abused by her husband for years and he eventually snatched away all the valuable belongings from their home and went missing. Initially, RM was unwilling to seek help from police and others. But,

[26] -di is a Bengali suffix used to respectfully address a woman. -di is translated to Ms. in English.

because of MN's husband, she came to know that the women's group offers legal advice for victims of abuse. Guided by MN, RM eventually joined the women's group to deal with her own case with other women.

Soon after RM joined the women's group, a problematic incident happened in Kamna. A senior worker in JDS, AP, who has learnt the incident through anecdotes and reports by her JDS colleagues, account the incident as follows:

*In the Kamna village, a pregnant woman had to be taken to a hospital but no auto-driver was agreeing to take her… So, the village women involved in JDS came questioning why the woman is not being taken to the hospital. They stopped the auto service and then the woman was taken to the hospital. After that, there were discussions with the political leaders and auto unions that who were these women who came out. Which political party are they associated with and what is their identity? (AP, a senior JDS staff member)*

Similarly, SS who is one of the founding members of the group and experienced the incident first-hand recalls that the incident played a critical role in forging the identity of the women's group as it forced the women to re-consider who they are:

*A pregnant woman had to deliver her child but the hospital was refusing to admit her and she was screaming in pain in the delivery room. So, a few of us went to the hospital and talked to the doctors. They asked us 'Who are you? Where have you come from? We said that we belong to 'Mahila Samiti'.*[27] *Then, they asked us what 'Mahila Samiti'? (SS, an AB member)*

In the face of this inquiry, these women came together to decide the name of their group. SS came up with the name AB meaning of which is 'toward the direction of light'. SS recalls the moment when the women's group was given the name AB as follows:

*MCR di said 'Write a name for the group', and we all started writing. I wrote the name AB…There were mothers who are victims of physical violence by their husbands. The husbands did not let their wives join the microfinance groups. But, the husbands should understand that when they will fall sick or something will happen, they don't have money. The husbands spent money in drinking. But, if someone is in our microfinance group, the wives can take loans and help the husbands. So, this is like showing light. I wanted to teach them what was good for them and their lives. This is what came to my mind. That is why I wrote the name*

[27] 'Mahila Samiti' is translated as women's organisation or committee in English.

*of AB. I wrote it. The (JDS) didis made it the name of the group… So, this is the matter. 10 of us created AB. (SS, an AB member)*

Through helping victims of violence over the decade, AB expanded its operation to more villages. It also happened that through several more rounds of Rapid Response Training, more rural women became AB members while some members also left the group. It is noteworthy that from 2002 to 2008, AB members did not receive any financial support from other organisations including JDS. AB members recall that they used to ask for donation among the members themselves as well as JDS staff to cover transportation costs to go to police stations and courts. They also point out that often times, such a small collective fund was not sufficient to cover other expenses to help victims of violence. Thus, the members ended up using their pocket money earned through their own labour such as providing tuitions to neighbours, farming and selling processed food.

By dealing with a larger number of cases of violence, AB and JDS noted that violence against women and girls tend to happen after marriage, and in particular when they get married at an early age. This realisation led JDS to conduct a further investigation into the oppressive situation of women:

*They were 14 or 15 years old so they didn't receive proper education nor develop any skill. They were married and after a few years they had children and were now facing violence. They had no place to go to. So then what we thought was that it isn't enough to provide rehabilitative support. We also need to work on preventive measure so that the violence doesn't reach this degree – the first thing to do here would be to stop child marriage. So we began talking about child marriage and working on that issue. (AP, a senior JDS staff member)*

Identifying child marriage as a root cause of the widespread violence against women and girls, JDS decided to make a campaign group comprised by women from the villages. At the end of 2011, JDS, through SW microfinance groups, spread the information into village women that there would be training related to women-oriented work in JDS office.[28] The women were also informed that once they successfully underwent a series of training, they would be appointed and paid for the women-oriented work. The training and job opportunity were of interest to many women but most of them could not proceed due to the opposition of their family. Eventually, dozens of women came to take the training in JDS office. The initial training for the rural women was provided by a professional trainer who works in an NGO in Talash. After the training, JDS staff selected 8 to 10 qualified

[28] In 2008, JDS's microfinance group members held an election and selected their representatives. As a result, JDS's microfinance groups became independent from JDS, and SW was established as a registered microfinance institution.

women to make the campaign group on women's and girls' issues, in particular, child marriage. Then, in 2012, the women named this campaign group CD. In the same year, JDS formally established a program specialised in women's and girls' rights and named it Women and Girls Rights Program to support AB's and CD's activities as well as to carry out campaigns for gender justice.

With the guidance of JDS, initially, CD tried to disseminate anti-child marriage messages into villages by attending SW microfinance group meetings where village women come together on a regular basis. In the meetings, CD members tried to explain the disadvantages of child marriage and advantages of promoting girls' education. However, this strategy did not work out because villagers saw CD members as outsiders and did not trust them at all. In some village meetings, women did not give time to talk with the members with the excuse of having to do household chores. In other villages, women complained about and ridiculed CD members:

*When we began working on stopping child marriages, the villagers would say that those didis are coming to break off our girls' marriages or those didis who are coming with bags on their shoulders, are they happy? These are something that we would have to hear. (SD, a CD member)*

Even in cases where village women listened to CD members on the surface, villagers often married their daughters off in secret. CD members attribute this failure partly to their poor communication skills at the time:

*At that time, we couldn't engage in much discussions. I mean, I'm talking about myself. I couldn't do it well. I used to feel scared, like oh my god! What should I say?! Every person used to say different things, the members of the groups (in villages) used to get agitated and used to start shouting, and they were out of control, they would become difficult to handle. (PN, a CD member)*

In the face of this failure, CD members came back to JDS seeking advice. In 2014, JDS asked a professional trainer in the British Council, PC, to train CD members to become capable of reaching village women more effectively. Since then, PC has held a series of training and monthly meetings to make CD members capable of engaging in dialogue with villagers. These training and meetings centred on discussing the fundamental meaning of gender and gender discrimination which turned out to be highly emotive for CD members:

*The very nature of discussions has been such that the CD women have had to question their own beliefs and life situations. Many themselves were married at an early age and had to face questions from the community where they went to discuss.*

*The meetings (in villages) became effective only when the members stopped distancing the discussions and began responding to their personal conflicts. (PC, a professional trainer)*

After undergoing a series of training with PC, several changes happened to the CD group. Firstly, the members have become capable of holding discussion with villagers, properly listening to and talking with them. Secondly, CD members decided to use real-life examples of the oppression of women which they themselves have experienced, in order to explain the disadvantages of child marriage and the importance of women's rights. Using an actual example from the villages themselves became a turning point for CD:

*A young girl of 13 to 14 gets married and is sent to her in-laws…That is the age to study, to play, to watch TV…As soon as she gets married and goes to someone else's house, she automatically becomes the bride of that house…Everything depends on her. From morning tea to dinner. If they need a glass of water, they will tell her to give it…She would start cooking and then go to watch a TV serial. While watching the show, she might have fallen asleep. All the while the vegetables were getting burnt. The food is spoilt and then the family members would come and beat her. This is how the oppression happens. We tried explaining to village women like this and slowly a lot of things changed. (SD, a CD member)*

Adopting this new approach and starting to communicate with village women more, CD members came to realise that child marriage happens partly because of the miscommunication between parents and children. The group identified the vicious cycle of miscommunication: a girl talk to male friends in school or fall in love with a boy; once parents come to know this, they get worried and rush to get the girl married off to another man; often this results in the resistance by the girl in the form of eloping without plan.

Thus, CD's campaign began to focus on improving the relationship between mothers and daughters. To this end, firstly, CD went to talk with village women (i.e., mothers) about their relationship with their children and how the relationship could be improved. While the response by the village women was positive, CD members felt that working with only one side is insufficient to improve the relationships between mothers and daughters. Thus, they began to visit schools to talk with teenage girls:

*(In the school), the young girls would tell us that their mothers don't understand. If they talk to (male) friends, someone would see them and complain to the mother who would assume that they are romantically involved with them. So, the girls have*

*to lie to them. Otherwise, there will be fights at home and they would be married off. (DL, a CD member)*

While some schools were happy to let CD create a space where teenage girls could share their thoughts with others, there were other schools which were unhappy about CD's campaign. The latter claimed that teenage girls neither fall in love nor are prone to eloping and eventually refused to collaborate with CD. Despite the rejection by some schools, talking with the teenage girls in the schools made CD members feel that there should be a space where teenage girls can more freely express themselves. Thus, CD members discussed with JDS staff and in 2015 they created a group for teenage girls which the girls themselves named MK. Since then, two CD members have become the coordinators of the group, facilitating discussions and workshops which take place on a regular basis in SW microfinance office building.

### 3. The SCP's activities

Having illustrated the journey of the SCP, I now explore the activities of the three groups – JDS, AB and CD – one by one. The exploration takes the following format. First, I start the exploration by briefly introducing the kinds of people comprising the group. This is followed by the illustration of their activities and the discussion of the unique approach that the group takes to facilitate their activities. Finally, I analyse resources critical for the group's activities and how the resources connect the group with the others within the SCP as well as those outside of it.

### 3.1 JDS's activities

As of January 2018, JDS has 15 staff members, among whom 7 are female and 8 are male. JDS staff range in age from their 20s to their 50s. The majority are Hindu. Except for two, JDS staff are from urban areas. They commute to JDS office which is located on the outskirts of Kolkata. Most of the JDS staff have a university or college degree, and many senior staff have a master's degree. The majority of them also have relevant work experience such as work in feminist organisations or NGOs.

JDS's activities are two-fold. The first part is its support for AB and CD. JDS provides these women with travel allowance and stipends.[29] It also arranges a series of professional training indispensable for AB's and CD's activities by inviting outside professionals such as MCR for the former and PC for the latter.

[29] As for stipends, AB members receive between 500 to 5,700 rupees per month depending on their level of experience while all the CD members receive 2,700 rupees per month. According to a senior staff member of JDS, in JDS's operational villages, women who do tailoring earn 4,000 to 5,000 rupees per month, and women who do pen making at home earn around 1,600 to 2,500 rupees per month.

JDS also connects AB and CD with like-minded organisations in Kolkata and other Indian states such as Maitree and Gandhi Foundation.[30]

The second part of JDS's activities centre on disseminating toward-gender-equality messages into villages. JDS does this by incorporating a rights perspective into its development programs. This approach is exemplified by SW, the member-governed microfinance institution for rural women which used to be JDS's microfinance program until 2008 and now an alliance of JDS.[31] As of January 2018, SW operates in 57 villages. As its protocol, SW asks new members to undergo a workshop on the policy of its financial services and women's rights. In tandem with the workshop, SW informs new members that they have access to AB's and CD's support in case they face violence or witness child marriage. Over the past decades, SW has given thousands of rural women access to saving and loans, while it never grants loans for illegal business, liquor business and dowry. Those working for SW point out that going beyond the financial benefits, SW has helped JDS to disseminate its toward-gender-equality messages into villages through SW's women beneficiaries:

*After SW was formed what happened was that women got the opportunity to go out of their homes. It used to happen that the men would tell the women ' why do you need to go out of the house? You are a woman! You don't know anything.' But after coming to these groups and listening to the discussions, the women have been able to step out of their homes, go to the bank ... Women who didn't even know where the bank was now can take care of their finances. If there are any problems at someone's house, 6 to 8 of our women go there and try to solve the problem. (AM, a SW staff member)*

System of Rice Intensification (SRI) is JDS's other program which disseminates toward-gender-equality messages into villages. SRI operates in 17 villages with the aim of increasing harvests and reducing production costs for farmers. Going beyond that, SRI, does advocacy work with women farmers. It questions the subordinate status of women in farming and tries to promote women's active participation in it. The staff in charge of the program explains how they disseminate its gender-equality message to women farmers as follows:

*(We tell the women farmers) since you are part of agriculture, since you are very much involved in agriculture, you should be considered as farmer. Not a farmer's*

[30] Maitree is a Kolkata-based forum which was established by feminists after the Beijing conference on women in 1995 (Roy, 2014).

[31] As of January 2018, SW and JDS are two independent organisations and each has its own office building. Nevertheless, they are working in collaboration. Firstly, JDS's Microfinance Unit plays a role of guarantor for SW. Secondly, JDS's Microfinance Unit helps SW's accounting by the latest soft wares.

*wife…The society is calling you a farmer's wife but you are a farmer. Why can't you decide with seeds to be sowed? Why can't you decide which land to plough? (PD, a senior JDS staff member)*

Similarly, JDS's other program, Income Generation Unit (IGU), has disseminated toward-gender-equality messages into villages since its establishment in the early 1990s. Over the past 26 years, IGU has trained and provided livelihoods to more than 800 rural women by means of embroidery, tailoring and soft toy making. Through IGU, hundreds of women not only have acquired technical skills to be economically self-dependent but also learned women's rights and gender through workshops. IGU's focus on women's self-dependence resulted in an independent production unit, AS, run by the trained women themselves. Currently, AS produces soft toy hangings and decorative items for domestic and international buyers without any support from IGU except for its financial support to pay AS's rent. A senior JDS staff member in charge of IGU explains its approach as follows:

*Suppose a child is a dropout...So she is married off as soon as possible by her parents. So, in such cases, we try to make it possible for her to earn some money and teach her new things. Only a man can earn money and not a woman…is the wrong way of looking at things. A woman can equally earn money and look after her family and herself. That is our thinking. So, we do not just give them technical training…we also try to help in their mental development. So, we have workshops here…on gender sensitisation… Our main focus is always making these women independent so that if they want to buy a cold drink, they don't have to go up to their husbands and ask for money. (DR, a senior JDS staff member)*

In March 2017, JDS launched Men's Engagement Program to further disseminate its gender-equality messages. The objective is to sensitise men about the problematics of gendered social norms. To this end, JDS recruited 30 men each of who plays a role of animator in their locality. While these animators are neither campaigners per se nor have personal relations with AB and CD members, they are asked to hold meetings in their villages (i.e., in 30 villages in total) to sensitise men. In the meetings, they talk about a variety of gender-related topics such as the division of labour between men and women deriving from the gendered social norms, domestic violence and both women's and men's rights. A senior JDS staff member in charge of Men's Engagement Program explains its objective and methodology as follows:

*It is just to sensitise them on gendered social norms…How your wife might feel when you beat her…So it is about raising a question. How you are taking part in rearing up your child? Are you taking up household chores? ...And at the same time,*

*we are supposed to make them realise how this patriarchal system is burdening some men...Why it is always like you have to earn everything for your family? It is only men's responsibility to be a breadwinner? So, (we) started talking like how to reduce some burden on you (men)...Why cannot you share? Why cannot a man cry? It is all about masculinity... that actually does not allow you to cry, because a man cannot show his weakness. We are just making them realising how the gendered social norms are actually affecting women and men differently. If we can do without this gendered norms, how our lives will be much easier. (PD, a senior JDS staff member)*

In addition to its development programs, JDS disseminates its gender-equality messages into villages through campaigns. One of JDS's key campaigns is the annual fortnight anti-violence campaign which takes place in collaboration with AB, CD, SW board members and some other villagers involved in JDS's programs. The objective of the campaigns is to combat violence against women and girls as well as child marriage. In the anti-violence campaign which took place from November 25$^{th}$ to December 14$^{th}$ 2017, for the first time in JDS's history, some of those involved in Men's Engagement Program became part of the campaign. Thus, the campaign is an important part of JDS's activities not only because of its wider audiences but also as an opportunity to bring JDS's different yet related programs together. Having presented JDS's activities, I now proceed to analyse the kind of approach JDS takes to facilitate its activities. It is clear that JDS's approach is rather ideological. For example, JDS incorporates the rights-based perspective in its development programs, introduces rural women to the idea that they have inalienable rights, and encourages them to reflect on the oppressive situation in villages. In addition, on many occasions, JDS refers to domestic and international laws to strengthen its toward-gender-equality messages. For instance, a senior JDS staff member's speeches in the fortnight campaign centred on her argument that gender-based discrimination (e.g., dowry, violence against women) that villagers experience on a daily basis is wrong and should not be seen as normal in the light of domestic and international laws.

There are two resources crucial for JDS's activities: money and other like-minded organisations/professionals. Firstly, money is critical for funding not only JDS's programs but also for enabling JDS to support AB's and CD's activities with travel allowance and stipends. JDS, at the moment, is undergoing something of a funding crisis and this is seen by many of the JDS staff members as a serious inhibitor of its activities. They explain that international donors divested their development funds from India as the country has recently attained rapid economic growth. They also complain that while there are funding opportunities for projects working on specific development fields, due to the different framework that JDS

uses, it cannot apply for the funds. For instance, it is hard to frame financial support for AB and CD members as project costs.

Secondly, other like-minded organisations and professionals are the other critical resource for JDS's activities. Many of the JDS staff members mention the importance of technical support given by other organisations such as Kolkata-based feminist organisations. JDS's connection with these NGOs is critical in organising training not only for AB and CD members but also for hundreds of women involved in JDS's development programs. The connection also works to bring like-minded professionals into JDS to strengthen the team. For instance, AM, a newly hired part-time employee of JDS, came to join JDS after she came to know it through her work as a professional counsellor in a women's rights organisation in Kolkata for 18 years.

### 3.2 AB's activities

Since its formation in 2002, AB, with the goal of helping victims of violence, has operated over 47 police administrative areas in rural West Bengal. As of January 2018, AB consists of 15 members all of whom are rural women. In the group, experienced founding members are in their 50s and 60s, while other members who joined the group later are mostly in their 30s and 40s. The members are literate but by no means highly educated except for a few. The majority of the members are Hindus except for a couple of Christians. While there are some Muslim communities in the area, no AB member is Muslim. According to JDS staff and AB members, women's mobility is more restricted in Muslim communities in the area, which may explain the underrepresentation of Muslim women in the group.

In order to deal with cases of violence, AB members work in a team of 2 to 4 people. This is a sensible strategy because working as a team does not hamper AB's activities even when some members become sick or cannot come to work due to family issues. AB members also point out that working in a team helps protect themselves from threats by perpetrators and anti-social gangs.

Over the past 18 years, AB has dealt with a large number of cases of violence. According to JDS's data, in 2015, AB handled 352 cases of violence and in 2016, it took up 254 cases of violence. AB members suggest that the reduction over the year is attributable to AB's activities. They say that nowadays many men give a second thought before they hit women because being taken to police or court is stigmatising. However, as will be discussed shortly, AB receives support from JDS, SW and CD in dealing with cases of violence. This collaboration may explain why AB which consists of only 15 women was capable of handling the huge number of cases in one year.

AB's activities centre on acting to help victims of violence. It deals with a wide range of violence such as physical violence, sexual violence and verbal abuses, and the victims can either be women or men. According to JDS's report, nowadays AB

mainly deals with physical violence against women at home by husband or/and in-laws. AB emphasises that many cases can be sorted out through discussion between victims and perpetrators with the help of AB members.

However, there are many other serious cases. In dealing with these cases, AB works closely with police because it is where AB helps victims file a general diary which tends prevent the situation from getting worse.[32] It is also police which issues key documents for AB's taking legal actions. In these serious cases, victims need medical treatment. Thus, AB also gets in touch with hospitals. Recently, AB handled a serious case of violence, contacting and seeking help from these institutions

*Her husband burnt her… Her case was extremely critical. They totally burnt her – 99 per cent burnt case. Only the area near her navel is left not burnt… we took her to a hospital. It was a summer time, and the girl was burnt – the whole body. She was having a burning sensation (because of the heat during summer time). We took her to the court in that condition…We went to the court, presented her in the court…while holding her. (RM, an AB member)*

Another form of violence which AB regularly handles is sexual violence. According to AB members, both women and small girls have become victims of sexual violence. As in the case of physical violence, firstly, AB tries to talk with victims but due to the nature of the violence, it often seeks advice and support from psychotherapists. AB also stays in touch with nearby hospitals which can accept rape victims. AB also collaborates with other NGOs which run orphanage because often victims of sexual violence get pregnant and give birth to a baby while they were not ready. In handling these cases, AB also works closely with JDS because perpetrators often hire anti-social gangs to threat AB so as not to let AB file a legal case against the perpetrators:

*Recently, there was this case where someone entered a house late at night and raped both the mother and the daughter. When they came to us, they didn't even have clothes on them – just a scarf. They were stripped of their panty and bra. So when they came to us (AB's office space), we clothed and fed them first. And after that, when we were taking them to the police station, we were constantly followed by men (associated with the perpetrator(s)) in their bikes. They even threatened to come and trash the JDS office. (GS, a JDS senior staff member)*

[32] In India, a general diary is made when any kind of complaint is lodged at the police. It renders the police aware that there is an incident which resulted in the complaint and thus, allows the police to take action later as deemed necessary.

AB also deals with cases of violence between households. In so doing, AB members try to engage in dialogue with stakeholders before suggesting that they should take legal action:

*The brothers were claiming that when they are with their wives the other one was peeking through the window. Both parties were blaming each other for doing the same thing. They continuously fought about it. We went to a police station over it... then one of them said his wife is expecting that the other brother has planted something in the ground near the room and all that. The child will die...We went to their mother and told her 'See, all of them are your children. This kind of thing happening in the house looks bad.' So, we tried to make them understand and resolve it amongst themselves… (As a solution), everyone got their own rooms and bathrooms. (SB, an AB member)*

In 2015, AB members also rescued two teenage girls from human trafficking. For AB members, this was quite a challenging case. In handling this, AB closely collaborated with Panchayat, police and Bhawani Bhavan (a government organisation):

*Both of the girls used to talk to those men…those men had called on a wrong number and that is how they got to talking. They became friends and then the girls gradually fell in love. So, with the promise of marriage, they took them to Mumbai. The men picked them from Howrah Station. Then, the girls told me that the men raped them multiple times on the train…*We u*sed to regularly go to the police station and the missing squad but nothing was helping. After one and a half months, one of the girls called us and said that she is lost…and after that her family contacted us…we recorded the whole conversation…And the (panchayat) members had told us 'We will bring the girl in a train and hand her over in the train station where she will identify you herself.' So, this way we retrieved that girl… After four and a half months we got the other girl's call and came to know that she was sold off at a red light area in Surat by that same woman who had the other girl. There the girl was always kept in a locked room. When I used to talk to that woman over the phone, I used to pretend that I am the girl's sister…she had demanded 50,000 rupees in exchange for her. I recorded that conversation too and handed it over to the person in charge at the police station…We kept going to the police and Bhawani Bhawan so that we could bring the girl back home. The girls' captors had told her brother to meet them at Campapur where they will hand over the girl. When they reached Howrah with the girls, she started crying and refused to get in the taxi. Seeing that, the police there arrested them and took them to the police station. After getting to know all this, I immediately went to the police station. (AN, an AB member)*

Having illustrated AB's activities, it is clear that despite comprising the SCP with JDS, AB's approach is rather action-oriented. As mentioned above, AB members often go to rescue victims of violence on their own. They also support victims with fighting cases by introducing them to lawyers and providing witness at court. They also take victims to hospital and other NGOs when necessary. They also accompany victims of violence and file a general diary at police when victims cannot do so on their own.

Nevertheless, it is noteworthy that AB's action-oriented approach is complemented by AB members' listening to and talking with victims of violence. In case the victims are mentally devastated, AB members do not rush for legal action. Instead, AB members put the victims in touch with psychotherapists who are expert listeners. It also often happens that by listening to victims intently, AB members realise that a case can be solved through dialogue at the household level. Only if victims cannot sustain their marriage even after a series of discussions, AB members give the victims legal advice on how to file a divorce and what kind of maintenance they might be entitled to obtain from their husband.

AB's action-oriented approach coupled with using dialogue to deal with violence and conflicts has been effective to disseminate toward-gender-equality messages into villages. This is because, firstly, by acting to help victims, AB has questioned the gendered social norms that criticise female victims of violence while perpetrators remain uncriticised. AB's activities also demonstrated to many villagers that victims can actually obtain justice by making use of legal system.

Secondly and more importantly, by having engaged in dialogue with victims over the past 18 years, AB came to reject the binary understanding of women are victims and men are perpetrators. Thus, AB now goes out to help victims regardless of their gender. This evolution appears to have resulted in AB's gaining trust from a wide range of villagers – including men – and garnering support for the SCP.

I now turn to analyse resources critical for AB's activities. Firstly, the example cases of violence illustrated above suggest that legal public institutions – i.e., police, court and Bhawani Bhavan – are an important resource for AB's activities. Without these legal public institutions, AB cannot help victims of violence and pursue justice.

Secondly, space is another critical resource for AB's activities. There are two important spaces for AB provided by SW. The first is AB's work space to which victims of violence come. AB's office space is located in SW office building and is equipped with a desk and a landline phone. Therein, one AB member is always on duty during day time to deal with victims of violence. It often happens that victims of violence come to AB members' home. In such cases, AB members ask the victims to go to the AB's work space in SW office. The second important space for AB is SW's meeting room. In this large meeting room, AB holds a regular monthly

meeting. In the meeting, AB members submit a form for travel allowance which has been provided by JDS since 2008. In the meeting, AB members are also asked to write down their action plan for the upcoming month and submit it to a senior JDS staff member.

Thirdly, another critical resource for AB's activities is technical support provided by other like-minded NGOs and professionals who work for women's and girls' rights. This is because often times, victims of violence need further support which cannot be provided by AB and JDS. In those cases, these like-minded organisations and professionals come to help them. In addition, AB members identify exposure visits to other like-minded organisations and professionals as important. These visits play a critical role in encouraging AB members to reflect on their and others' activities and how AB's can be improved further to help victims of violence.

### 3.3 CD's activities

The other group which comprises this SCP is CD. Since its formation in 2012, CD has engaged in dialogue with village women and teenage girls with the goal of eradiating child marriage. As of January 2018, CD has 9 members all of whom are rural women. The members are in their 20s and 30s, and most of them were married when they were still teenagers. As a result, despite being literate, they stopped short of completing higher secondary education. Majority of the CD members have experienced physical and verbal abuse at home even though since working for CD, the situation has dramatically improved for many. The members do not have substantial work experience and regard CD's activities as paid work.

CD builds its anti-child marriage discourse and disseminate it through two key meetings. The first key meeting is Strategy Planning Meeting which takes place once a month in SW's meeting room. Strategy Planning Meeting is organised and moderated by PC, the trainer from the British Council and two female senior JDS staff members. Under PC's guidance, CD members reflect on their activities in villages for the past month and plan a strategy for the next month. Each CD member is in charge of activities in one village but the group is aiming to expand its operation to some more villages.

The other key meeting is a monthly meeting with female villagers, currently taking place in 11 villages. CD calls this monthly village meeting Support Group Meeting. Each Support Group Meeting takes 75 minutes and has 10 to 30 female participants from the locality. In Support Group Meeting, CD members and village women play games as ice breaker and talk about women and girls related topics. The topics range from child and early marriage, domestic violence, and human trafficking to women's and girls' rights such as their rights of bodily integrity, choosing clothes, mobility and decision making, to name a few.

For a month, the village women are asked to think over the topics introduced by CD members. According to CD members, it often happens that village women give them suggestions about which gender-related topics should be discussed in the next month. CD members also emphasise that the meetings work as a space for village women to reflect on their own situations in the context where such a chance is rarely given to them:

*This discussion session looks into the fact that women should be able to give themselves some spare time, to be able to think about themselves. So, we, in this group, through light games, singing, or discussions, make these women think about their well-being as well. (PN, a CD member)*

As discussed in Section 2, in response to the failure of one-way, direct approach, CD began to engage in dialogue with village women by using real-life examples of the oppression of women which they themselves have experienced. Thanks to this more dialogic approach, the discussion with village women can go deeper, triggering village women's reflection on the boundary between personal affairs and public concerns which need to be dealt with. A CD member recalls how dialogue with village women in Support Group Meetings helped a woman open up her experience of violence which questions the mainstream concept of violence against women:

*We saw one girl is sitting quietly in a corner. Not speaking to anybody…So, the first day she didn't have courage to say anything. After that, when we were going again and again, we decided to talk about a topic that will…give her the assurance to talk about her problem. So, when we went there and spoke about domestic violence…Then, slowly she told us…'Every night, at least 3 to 4 times my husband rapes me and that too by showing me different videos and forcing me to enact it the same way…All those things that he is making me do, I can't refuse that. I am being tortured this way. But I can't make others understand this… (unlike when) people can see that I am beaten up or I am not given food' (MM, a CD member)*

As the example above shows, CD's activities centres on engaging in dialogue with village women so as to understand their problems. However, CD members also have to act to solve problems:

*When I first came to work, I got a call at midnight. So, after I got the call um from my pishi's (father's sister) son – he said 'Didi, a girl from Thartar has run away and come here. She is getting married. What should we do?' Since it is quite far, I couldn't go that night…I was also new and had just began training...So, I called*

*JL and DL (more experienced CD members) and whatever they told me (over the phone) I repeated that to my pishi's son. They stopped the marriage. They put on a lot of pressure on the parents. The next day, the girl went home and the boy stayed at home too. The wedding didn't take place. (JS, a CD member)*

CD's approach of using both dialogue and action seems to be effective as it makes villagers aware of the activities of CD in their community:

*If someone leaves from their home, then MC di and RI di go to their home and try to make them understand. If there is some trouble or problem, they talk to the family members and try to sort it out…When MC di and RI di tell them that it is a crime to get a girl who is not yet 18 years of age married…and if they go through with it…they will call the police and file a case. This scares them and they back off for the time being…They stop the marriage. (PD, a village girl & MK member)*

Having laid out CD's activities and its approach to disseminate the anti-child marriage message, I now turn to analyse resources critical for CD's activities. The first critical resource is technical support provided by other like-minded NGOs and professionals who work for women's and girls' rights. It is noteworthy that only after undergoing a series of training sessions organised by professional trainers from feminist NGOs and the British Council, did CD members become ready to go to villages and effectively carry out the campaign.

The second critical resource is guidance by JDS staff. As mentioned above, CD members themselves used to be oppressed at home and even unable to hold discussion with villagers. Only after undergoing a series of training organised by JDS and learning how to carry out the campaign under the guidance of the JDS staff, did they transform themselves into full-fledged campaigners.

Another resource critical for CD is space. For the group, SW's meeting room is quite important as it is where Strategy Planning Meeting takes place on a monthly basis. Based on my observation of the monthly meeting on the 22nd December 2017, CD's monthly meeting was far more substantial than AB's. In this half-day meeting, detailed strategies for the next month were discussed and the members also worked together to make a game booklet which would be useful for Support Group Meetings in villages.

I also point out that for CD, the funds given by JDS should be seen as a resource. While AB members worked from their own money without receiving even travel allowance for nearly a decade, CD members see the activities as paid work. Thus, CD members expect JDS to give them travel allowance and stipends, and without the money, the group will not function as it does.

### 3.4 The achievements of the SCP

Finally, I would like to reflect on the achievements of this SCP. My analysis of fieldwork data shows that this SCP as a whole has contributed to the promotion of gender justice in the region. For instance, as discussed in Section 3.1, more and more women began to come out of home to save money in SW microfinance groups and even use money at their discretion. Going beyond that, many interviewees hold that some radical changes for gender equality have taken place because of the SCP's activities. This is encapsulated in the remark by BG who has been involved in JDS's and SW's microfinance groups since the early 1990s:

*The women are fighting for their maintenance. They are going to the court of law, police stations. So, these, I feel, are not little things in progression. These are like larger than the large social change. I feel that way. When we are suppressed, when we are downtrodden, from that place we have, lots of times…brought many women out of it…Suppose she wants to study, her mother and father want to get her married off. We are going to those places as well and protesting. Then, say, in a house the maternal uncle's son, paternal aunt's son, paternal uncle's son, they rape a woman, she is not able to say anything. From that place also we have come out to a certain extent. Father is raping...not once, twice or thrice. A lot of cases like this have come. The culprit has been put behind bars. The landlord or house owner is raping. He has also gone to jail. These, I think, are huge...huge changes. That, we are being able to do it. We are being able to show it. (BG, a SW board member)*

Despite the claim that the SCP has brought about these positive changes, I would like to reflect on three methodological limitations. Firstly, it is difficult to separate out what is directly due to the SCP's activities from broader social change. This is particularly the case because since 2011, the West Bengal government, under the initiative of Mamata Banerjee, has been working for making the lives of women and girls better (see Chapter 4 Section 2.2). For instance, in 2012, the West Bengal government launched Anondodhara with the object of improving the livelihood of rural people including rural women (West Bengal Government, 2020a). In fact, many interviewees told me that they received agricultural support and gained access to microfinance and savings through this governmental program. In addition, in 2014, the West Bengal government launched Kanyashree Prakalpa with the object of combatting child marriage and promoting girls' education (West Bengal Government, 2020c). Even this conditional cash transfer scheme was mentioned by some interviewees and a few of them told me that they made use of the money to let their daughters pursue higher education. These governmental programs appear to have encouraged villagers to take the actions which were once conceived as against social norms. It is also noteworthy that effective law enforcement bolsters people's actions against gender injustice, and this is

significantly influenced by broader social change. Even in this regard, it is difficult to attribute the justice-promoting changes in the region merely to the SCP's activities.

Secondly, the data presented in this chapter may have been affected by ad-hoc rationalisation and inaccurate memory of the interviewees. For instance, the founding members of AB said that they were concerned about the situation where women were beaten up and thus acted against it of their own accord in the early 1990s. However, there is a possibility that as they do not remember the past event in detail, they might have described it as if they were AB members at that time.

Thirdly, the voices used in this chapter are from those directly involved in the SCP. Thus, it is possible that these informants were motivated to talk highly positively about the movement while downplaying its failures and limitations. Even though the journey of the SCP presented in this chapter may strike readers as a relatively linear evolution of the SCP, it is important to remember that in reality the journey could have been far more complex with many more failures and limitations.

## 4. Conclusion

Having illustrated the SCP's journey and explored the development of the SCP's activities to pursue their goals, this chapter explored *who have been involved in the SCP and how*. It brought out three important findings. Firstly, the three groups comprising the SCP take different approaches to advance their goals, by utilising discussion and action to different degrees. The exploration also illuminated that each group's distinct approaches have played critical roles in building and effectively disseminating the SCP's counter discourse into wider publics. The JDS's rather ideological approach has played a critical role in strengthening the SCP's counter discourse with the language of rights – which is founded on the concept of equal dignity – as a discursive resource. Its ideological approach may also explain why the SCP began its campaign by firstly problematising the most conspicuous forms of oppression of women (i.e., physical and sexual violence) and now tackles less noticeable ones (i.e., lack of opportunities for women and girls to play sports) – the move which more adequately fulfils the normative criterion of equal dignity. On the other hand, AB's and CD's approach, characterised by actually engaging in discussion with stakeholders and acting to promote their goals, have played an important role in substantiating the feasibility of their claims, gaining trust from villagers and eventually garnering support for the SCP. In the light of such complex operation of the SCP, I have to question both Fraser's conceptualisation of an SCP and Sen's theorisation of public reasoning because both of them heavily rest on their discursive features while overlooking the importance of practical action.

Secondly, the exploration suggested that each group's distinct approach is substantially informed by the group members' diverse experiences and

positionalities in relation to the oppressive situation. JDS staff are educated professionals, coming from outside the villages, and thus carry out its programs by utilising the idiom of human rights and overtly asserting what is wrong and right. AB takes a rather action-oriented approach because the group was formed and led by very action-oriented village women who have acted to help victims since the early 1990s. AB's strategy to complement its action-oriented approach with carefully listening to and talking with stakeholders (including both victims and perpetrators) is explicable by the fact that they are rural women who have to go back to their home in the community at the end of the day. CD's most dialogic approach centred on visiting and talking with villagers at length to eradicate the practice of child marriage can be explained by the fact that most of the group members have been the victims of oppression in the villages. In order to facilitate the group's campaign, CD members must have utilised their personal experience of negotiating oppression through patiently and continuously communicating with their oppressors. In response to this finding that the SCP consists of quite heterogeneous people, I have to question Fraser's initial theorisation (1999) which gives one an impression that SCP is made up of only marginalised people. I argue that Fraser's later theorisation (2008) that quite diverse kinds of people come together with a shared concern about an issue and form a public better captures the heterogeneity within the SCP.

Thirdly, the exploration illuminated that the SCP operates in tandem with other organisations and people which provide it with critical resources such as financial and technical resources as well as spaces where discussions can take place. The exploration further revealed that these resources connect the three groups – JDS, AB and CD – with each other as well as with outside organisations and people in an organic way. The organic operation of an SCP was theorised by Fraser (1991) in reference to 'inter public coordination' to disseminate its discourse into wider publics. Nonetheless, the exploration drew further attention to the fact that when the input of these critical resources is cut down, the SCP's operation is severely inhibited. Thus, I argue that an SCP's operation is never adequately understood when one treats it as an independent, stand-alone entity.

Bringing a close light on *who has been involved in this SCP and how*, the three findings from this chapter drew attention to the important and paradoxical operation of this SCP. That is, on the one hand, this SCP operates in a very *complex* manner as it consists of the three groups which are made by different kinds of people. Each group also adopts different approaches for pursuing its goals utilising both discussions and actions to a different degree. In addition, the SCP's operation is both facilitated and inhibited by a number of other organisations and people which provide it with technical, material and financial resources. On the other hand, this SCP is *united* as the three groups remain cohesive with the shared goal of gender justice and collectively generate the toward-gender-equality discourse amid the

oppressive social norms widespread in the region. In addition, this SCP operates in tandem with a large number of other organisations and people in an organic, united way. I would like to call this paradoxical operation of the SCP *complex unity*.

While it is uncertain that *complex unity* is an inherent nature of any SCP, the findings from this chapter strongly resonate with the complexity of the two SCPs illuminated in Chapter 3.

# Chapter 6 Empirical exploration of an SCP in West Bengal II

## 1. Introduction

In this chapter, I take a further step to gain a thorough understanding of the justice-promoting SCP in West Bengal. Building on the findings from Chapter 5, I explore how it became possible for quite diverse people – professionals from urban West Bengal and rural women – to form this SCP and how they have been able to continue the campaign over the past 26 years.

In order to advance this inquiry, I draw on the concept of agency which in the capability approach literature is conceptualised as 'the ability to pursue goals that one values and has reason to value' (Alkire and Deneulin, 2009, p.31). Agency is clearly indispensable in the emergence of an SCP, and this chapter offers an opportunity to explore the form that agency takes.

Before proceeding, it is important to distinguish the approach to agency taken here from that commonly used in the capability approach literature. Discussion of agency in that literature often places a strong emphasis on individuals' agency, and sees such individuals as endowed with exceptional capacities. Sen (2010, p.287) for example, theorises that 'agency encompasses all the goals that a person has reason to adopt, which can inter alia include goals other than the advancement of his or her own well-being'. In underscoring the link between a person's agency and its potential contribution to justice-promoting change, Sen (2010, pp.289-290) uses the examples of Mohandas Gandhi, Martin Luther King Jr, Nelson Mandela and Aung San Suu Kyi. In so doing, he does not pay due attention to the fact that these exceptional individuals contributed to justice-promoting changes only through being part of wider SCPs (India's independence movement, the American Civil Rights struggle, the Anti-Apartheid movement and the Burmese National League for Democracy, respectively).

In contrast to Sen's identification of exceptional individuals and their agency with justice-promoting changes, through the analysis of fieldwork data, I propose two important findings: 1) the agency of those involved in this SCP is built through the dynamic interaction of three kinds of critical factors – emerging capacities, compassion and passion, and enabling interpersonal relationships; 2) the emergence and evolution of this SCP and the development of its members' agency reinforce each other.

In presenting these important findings, I draw on the relational approach to agency which posits 'in the beginning there is the relation' (Donati, 2011, cited by Burkitt, 2018, p.523) and thus 'the objects and entities (are) produced in relations' (Burkitt, 2016, p. 331). Theorists of the relational approach to agency (Emirbayer and Mische, 1998; Burkitt, 2016, 2018; Jha, 2018) challenge the solipsist, goal-oriented model of agency that sees a lone individual acting to achieve his/her fixed, individual goals. These theorists, instead, propose that people produce particular

effects in the world and on each other through their relational connections and interactive activity (Burkitt, 2016, 2018). They further argue that individuals are forged through manifold relations with others and their goals emerge and change as a result of the shifting configurations of relations in which they are embedded (ibid).

The case for adopting this relational approach to agency to explore the SCP builds on two key dimensions of public reasoning discussed in Chapter 2. Section 2: collective and intersubjective dimensions. I argue that in order to explore this SCP – which engages in public reasoning – a framework which harmonises and strengthens these two dimensions of public reasoning is necessary and the relational approach to agency can do this. As discussed in Chapter 2. Section 2, the collective dimension of public reasoning sheds light on collective forces exemplified by 'collective capability' which not an individual alone but a group of people acting together can generate and exercise (Kelly, 2012). The intersubjective dimension of public reasoning, on the other hand, brings to light 'processes in which (a person's) preferences, values and beliefs come into play in a dialogue with others, dialogues in which one's positions can be modified, adjusted or even abandoned' and could result in widening one's 'horizons of expectations' (Pereira, 2013, p.178). While these dimensions of public reasoning helpfully expand beyond a focus on the individual, they still have limitations which are exemplified by Kelly's and Pereira's arguments. Kelly's argument on 'collective capabilities' presupposes that individuals who are already capable of engaging in public reasoning act together to bring about changes. Pereira's argument on the intersubjective dimension tends to focus on one-on-one interpersonal relations and stops short of paying due attention to dynamic manifold relations within which individuals are nested.[33] The relational approach to agency introduced above enables us to bring their arguments together into a single position, providing a robust framework to explore how this SCP emerges, to generate a trans-individual discursive force.

In addition, the relational approach to agency tightly fits with the empirical finding from Chapter 3 that the actual operation of SCPs may be more aptly understood by a relational perspective, as implied in Fraser's key argument of 'the dual function of an SCP'. This holds that on the one hand, an SCP works as the space of withdrawal and regroupment for those marginalised and thus they can formulate oppositional interpretations of their identities, interests and needs; on the other hand, the SCP functions as bases and training grounds for agitational activities directed toward wider publics.

In the following sections, I present the three factors that the data show to be critical in enabling this relational agency to emerge – i.e., emerging capacities,

[33] Pereira (2013) acknowledges the importance of both intersubjective dimension of public reasoning and collective actions in promoting justice. He suggests that theorising justice necessitates bringing these two points together. Nevertheless, he stops short of exploring this, saying that such an inquiry is beyond the scope of his current work.

compassion and passion, and enabling interpersonal relationships. I then analyse how these critical factors interact with each other, contributing both to the development of the agency of those involved in the SCP and to the emergence and evolution of the SCP itself.

## 2. Emerging capacities

I begin by drawing attention to the capacities that are indispensable for the emergence of the SCP: critical reflection, capacity to hold discussion and navigational capacity. While these capacities are characteristics of each individual in the SCP, neither their development nor function can be adequately understood in individual terms. Rather, I would like to call these capacities *emerging capacities* to signify that these capacities have been developed relationally – i.e., through the interaction with others – and used to influence their interpersonal relationships around them.

### 2.1 Critical reflection

For the SCP to emerge, it is indispensable for capacity for critical reflection to be developed amongst those who constitute it. As will be shown by fieldwork data below, the emerging capacity for critical reflection is informed by the following characteristics: awareness that women are suffering and this is not just 'natural'; realisation that their suffering is caused not by individual fault but by an oppressive social structure and norms; and identification that this is wrong and needs to be transformed.

While, as of the time of fieldwork, all those involved in this SCP were able to critically examine their immediate situations, only some of them had this capacity at the time they became involved in the SCP. These are exemplified by individuals who had a formative influence on the SCP – i.e., SS and MN (the founding members of AB) and RJ (the director of JDS). As illustrated in Chapter 5, the two founding members of AB reflected on and questioned such oppressive situation of women in their localities as early as the 1990s. Similarly, RJ, the director of JDS, did so around the same time when he came to the Shakti area, West Bengal as part of his work for a rural development NGO. The interview with RJ shows that he had a capacity of critical reflection as of the early 1990s which played a critical role in the formation this SCP:

*Once we started working with a lot of women, we discovered that maybe livelihoods in itself was not enough. While they needed, yes, they needed to stand economically on their own feet, they also needed lot of understanding of 'why they are in that condition' – the institutional patriarchy which led to tremendous incidence of violence… So, we started these numerous programs and then we started addressing*

*some of the most important issues for women, one of which is the whole issue of violence. (RJ, the director of JDS)*

RJ's use of the word '*the institutional patriarchy'* clearly shows his awareness that violence against women is caused not by each woman's misbehaviour but rather, happens due to an oppressive social structure. In addition, RJ problematises violence against women without seeing it as 'natural' and decided to do something about it. RJ was brought up in Kerala which is known for being more gender equitable, and studied agriculture in prestigious universities in India. Through several conversations with him during the fieldwork, I felt that his background contributed to developing his capacity for critical reflection. Nonetheless, RJ's critical reflection resulted in his acting to help the formation of AB only through RJ's interaction with rural women including SS and MN who similarly problematised the oppression of women. This shows that RJ's capacity for critical reflection is an integral part of his agency which develops relationally and simultaneously results in the emergence of the SCP.

On the other hand, through a series of gender and rights-based training sessions organised by JDS, capacity for critical reflection was generated amongst many other SCP members. One of such persons is RM, an AB member with more than 15 years of experience. As discussed in Chapter 5, RM used to be repeatedly abused by her husband who eventually snatched away all her belongings and disappeared to marry another woman. MN's taking her to JDS office became a turning point in her life, transforming her into a key member of AB. RM admits that in the past, she was unable to reflect on the immediate, oppressive situation and tried to accept it:

*(Back then), I did not understand my own rights. How much I have – I was unable to understand that. After coming here, after undergoing the training, I understood what is mine and how much is mine – I understood myself. Through the training programs conducted here, I went through all kinds of changes. (RM, an AB member)*

By coming to understand her rights as human and realise that she deserves justice, RM obtained a new sense of identity as a person. The way this happened signifies that RM's capacity for critical reflection has developed relationally through her interaction with people who already critically reflect on the oppressive situation. In her statement below, RM further demonstrates her highly developed capacity for critical reflection. That is, RM seems to be fully aware that her and other oppressed women's suffering derive from the same cause such that helping them means challenging it. This realisation seems to have helped RM to redeem her suffering of not having received justice as an individual through achieving justice for others:

*I myself had to do very hard work and suffer a lot. So, other girls are also going through a tough phase and they are also suffering. So I jump in to help whenever anyone is in any trouble because I have faced it myself… (pause)…I love this work so much that…(pause)…By putting myself in the position of other women, I performed my responsibilities. So that whatever I could not get, whatever I did not receive, I will get it through other women. That's it. For example, for someone, the judgement has been provided about which we will discuss tomorrow. The judgement has been obtained. I mean, I am happier than them. The fact that I have not received justice – I have no regrets about it. But I have obtained justice for them. Previously, I didn't understand all these. I didn't know about all these. (RM, an AB member)*

Similarly, capacity for critical reflection was generated amongst CD members – who were victims of violence and/or child marriage – through the gender and rights-based training and the practical work involved in being CD members. In the interviews, CD members told me that previously, when they were oppressed, they kept their patience and tried to come to terms with the situation. They emphasised that only after taking part in the training, did they come to be capable of understanding their rights, how gender oppression works and why challenging it is important. Such development of capacity for critical reflection is exemplified by MM who began to question even the oppressive social structure and norms concerning dress code and mobility:

*After becoming a member of CD, immense change has occurred, because the rights about which we were unaware of, those things, of course, we came to know about…Whatever is your own choice, you can wear. That is, 'you must wear (certain dress)' – there is nothing like that…You have your own independence regarding your way of talking, way of walking and moving…Earlier, we ourselves were also scared. That is, the biggest concern was 'what will the society say?'(MM, a CD member)*

Similarly, capacity for critical reflection was generated amongst many JDS members only after their joining JDS – i.e., through their seeing the oppressive situation of women first-hand and undergoing JDS's gender and rights-based training. On joining JDS, they already had a good reasoning capacity which must have been nurtured through their tertiary education and previous work. Nevertheless, they told me that they stopped short of critically reflecting on the oppressive situation of women. For instance, PD, a senior JDS staff member admits that only after being introduced to the idea of rights and gender through training, did he begin to question the oppressive situation of women:

*I joined JDS to provide technical inputs…Here, I was introduced into a right-based approach. Here, I was introduced with 'gender'. You know gender, patriarchy, masculinity, although I heard them earlier, it was very much limited understanding. Here, the chance was to actually realise these things in practice – how women use the (idea of) rights they are learning from JDS…I started to explore more, and I also started at the same time, to question why LGBT should not be incorporated into society…If discrimination is happening, if you are asking men to be sensitised to women, why not to each of us, why not to the queer people, why not to our kids? (PD, a senior JDS staff member)*

PD's capacity for critical reflection now enables him to systematically identify the oppressive situation of women with the help of the newly learned concepts. Furthermore, PD's statement shows that he now recognises equal dignity of human beings and extends the systematic analysis to other marginalised social groups. This is remarkable because in rural West Bengal, LGBT communities suffer severe discrimination and children are expected to blindly obey adults (e.g., parents and teachers). In the follow-up interview, I asked PD why he is concerned about marginalised people to whom many Indian people do not pay adequate heed. He told me that '*I believe the concept of well-being and happiness is collective! It is connected with others. How can you be happy alone when others are in distress?'* The answer underscores that his recognition of the commonality of having dignity as human comes with the sense of an inevitable connection with others no matter how marginalised they are.

The discussion of this section demonstrated that for the emergence of the SCP, capacity for critical reflection needs to be generated amongst the SCP members. It underscored that the SCP members critically reflect on the situation where people are embedded, and thus their critical reflection works in tandem with their interactions with others. It also highlighted that many developed this capacity through coming together with other SCP members, in particular, through interactions with and training organised by those who already have this capacity. This suggests that capacity for critical reflection is indeed *an emerging capacity* which develops relationally.

### 2.2 Capacity to hold discussion

For the SCP to emerge, it is indispensable for capacity to hold discussion to be developed amongst those who constitute it. This capacity enables the SCP members to advance their claim by stating reasons while allowing those whom they communicate with to do the same. Chapter 5 showed that all the groups necessitate this capacity to disseminate the pro-gender equality discourse into wider publics – i.e., villagers, victims and perpetrators of violence and child marriage and public officials in Panchayat, police and courts.

In the case of JDS staff, their capacity to hold discussion is crucial to carry out its development programs which introduce the concept of rights to villagers. AM is a senior gender trainer with more than 30 years of work experience in feminist organisations and specialised in campaign design and psychological counselling of victims of violence in JDS. She told me that one of the most important things in promoting gender justice is to communicate with villagers, explaining their rights and the necessity to act for them:

*When we are talking of rights, and we are a rights based organisation…So our approach is not to give. That's not the way we operate. Once you are trying to promote rights, you are trying to promote the concept of rights within women and in the community, but it is very difficult for people to accept. Because people are very much used to getting things. And rights are not going to give you things in your hand. It's something that you have to earn and you have to fight for. You have to be really courageous to go and demand what you owe…Staying in my own home is my right. Getting the custody of children is my right. Getting a shelter is my right. Living a violence free life is my right. So, where do I get this right? I cannot go and buy these things from the shop. So, these are certain things which I have to demand from society. (AM, a senior gender trainer in JDS)*

AM's statement underscores that JDS's approach is centred on communicating with villagers and encouraging them to critically reflect on their immediate circumstance. This is not easy because, in this part of rural West Bengal, people are used to becoming beneficiaries of development programs as mentioned in Chapter 4.2. Nonetheless, JDS's strategy is, through communicative interactions, to make villagers understand that they have rights and fighting for them is necessary even if doing so could cause further difficulties at their ends. Through the lens of the relational approach to agency, the difficulties can be seen as disruptions on the existing interpersonal relations – e.g., with husbands, in-laws and neighbours – which requires them *'to be really courageous'*. It is noteworthy that AM's critical reflection on the oppressive situation embodies itself through the medium of talk and is passed on to villagers through communicative interactions.

Similarly, for AB members, the capacity to hold discussion is indispensable because for them to help victims of violence, they have to communicate effectively with all the stakeholders – victims, perpetrators, other people surrounding them as well as those involved in the legal system. Due to the circumstances where incidents of violence happen, it is often the case that this capacity to hold discussion needs to be highly developed. BK, an experienced AB member, told me that even prior to joining AB, she acted to help victims of violence on her own in her neighbourhood by holding discussion with them and other interested parties:

*In the next house to ours, there was a Hindustani (non-Bengali, north Indian) who hit his wife and cracked her leg…So, I told her 'You immediately go to see a doctor and explain what have happened.' But, the girl did not say (what actually happened) and said 'I fell down and cracked my leg.'…They also did not allow the girl to go outside the house and put her in a locked room throughout the entire day and night. The girl used to speak with me from the window of her house. Then, I said, 'Ok, what do you want?' She said 'No. I am giving you my belongings. So, you keep them. I will run away in the dawn.' I said 'No. People will say that you made a relationship with a man and ran away. If you want to run away, let it be done in the morning. I will call people, and after that, you will run away.' I said so and kept her (in my house)… So, I called the manager of the office where that (abusive) boy used to work. I called everyone. After calling them, I said 'The girl cannot be locked up in such a way because she is also a human being, right?' The girl used to sit at home making sarees, and the boy used to seize her income. After that, I said, 'No, this is not right.' Then, what the people in the office did is to divide his income into two halves. The boy used to earn 12,000 rupees. 6,000 rupees was given to the girl and the remaining 6,000 rupees was kept for himself. In this way, he stayed. And then I sent the girl to her father's house. (BK, an AB member)*

The story above clearly shows how BK, with a highly developed capacity to hold discussion, brought other actors into the situation and enabled a resolution to be found. Firstly, by talking with the abused girl continuously, BK established a relationship with her. The trust deriving from the relationship allowed BK to negotiate the strategy to save the abused girl and shelter her at BK's house. Furthermore, BK tried to solve the problem by bringing a wider group of people into the discussion. By referring to the dignity of the girl, BK made the office people act to save her from abuse. While not explicitly stated, it seems that BK's capacity to hold discussion further resulted in convincing the abused girl's natal family to accept her and eventually sending her home. In the context of rural West Bengal, this is a radical thing to do because natal families often do not want to take their daughters back once they are married. While the girl left her husband's house, BK's action resulted in the girl's receiving the maintenance which is a remarkable achievement in this context.

The importance of the capacity to hold discussion is also evident for CD members. As discussed in Chapter 5, CD's campaign is centred on disseminating the anti-child marriage message into villages through the medium of talk. In addition, the capacity becomes critical when CD members come together to make plans and allocate responsibilities to each member in monthly Strategy Planning Meeting. It is noteworthy that unlike the JDS staff and majority of AB members, CD members did not have this capacity as of their forming or joining CD. As mentioned in Chapter 5, they had to undergo a series of training sessions (which

focused on improving their communication capacities) organised by JDS staff. In addition, CD members told me that for them to become fully-fledged campaigners, they had to actually work in the field, discussing with villagers. Thus, the process of developing their capacity to hold discussion was relational. A CD member PN exemplifies such a process of transformation. In the interview, she explained to me that in the past she was incapable of holding discussion at all:

*So, the thing is that earlier when anything used to happen to me, I used to speak up at times but didn't really understand when to say what and how to say it. I didn't quite understand the right thing to say to get something done. I mean, when somebody used to say something against me, it used to go on for a long time. I used to silently tolerate that, not being able to answer back and thinking to myself that what if answering back leads to further problems. (PN, a CD member)*

After undergoing the training organised by JDS and actually working in the villages, she became capable of holding discussions. In the interviews, she drew attention to the recent changes taking place among village women whom she has been interacting with:

*Earlier, they used to call us and tell us about the problems that they used to witness around them, like young girls getting married or some family issues that somebody is facing, but they didn't think of those for themselves in such details as they do now. But, those same people are now thinking about themselves too. For example, keeping aside some curry for themselves, which I used to do myself, when I told this to them, some of the women who come from joint families, do the same. [34] They also have to eat well, otherwise how will they take up the responsibility to look after the rest of the people in the house? Now that this thought has been introduced in their minds, they are thinking about this. Apart from that, they are also thinking and working towards their own health and well-being based on how they will otherwise look after the family members. Nowadays, many of these members talk about themselves, how they have lost lots of their own childhood likings and dreams...dancing...singing. (PN, a CD member)*

PN shared her negative experience of being abused by her in-laws and how she has negotiated it with village women. This passionate approach enabled the women to see themselves as also entitled and worthy of good food. The story shows that the transformation that PN underwent is beginning to take place among village women. That is, in the past, these women used to be unable to reflect on the most immediate oppression inflicted upon themselves and their communication style was

[34] In this part of rural West Bengal, it is the custom for women to eat last, and this particularly holds true for more junior women in household such as newly married women.

not genuinely dialogical (i.e., mere report of other people's problems). However, now these women realise that they themselves have been oppressed and try to communicate about their suffering with each other. Thus, the story indicates that both capacities for critical reflection and to hold discussion develop relationally. Another remarkable point is that their discussions on the importance of a practical wellbeing dimension (i.e., eating well) expanded into their acknowledging the quite wide range of wellbeing dimensions (i.e., having dreams as well as fun through dancing and singing). Thus, the story also brings to light the potential of discussion to collectively identify capabilities which may be seen as their entitlements.

The discussion of this section demonstrated that the SCP advances through the extension of the capacity to hold discussion amongst its members. It also brought to light three important characteristics of the capacity. Firstly, the SCP members' critical reflection of the oppressive situation embodies itself and is shared with others (e.g., villagers) through discussion. Secondly, the SCP members use the capacity to convince others to act so as to transform existing interpersonal relationships which sustain the oppressive situation. Thirdly, when the SCP members use this capacity with passion, the communicative interaction can lead to the emergence of this capacity among other people with whom they are interacting.

### 2.3 Navigational capacity

The other emerging capacity indispensable for the development of the SCP is navigational capacity. The importance of navigational capacity was drawn attention to by Appadurai (2004) who characterised it as the capacity to plan a route for a goal and attempt to actualise the goal by 'being conscious of the links between a wide range of means and ends' (Appadurai, 2004, p.68). This capacity is also used when referring to 'how people act in difficult or uncertain circumstances and in describing how they disentangle themselves from confining structures, plot their escape and move towards better positions' (Vigh, 2010, p.419). The discussion in Chapter 3 brought to light how this navigational capacity develops: it develops relationally through interactions among like-minded people, and its development goes in tandem with their obtaining relevant knowledge.

For AB members, navigational capacity is indispensable because in order to help victims of violence, they have to act in difficult – and often dangerous – circumstances. In the interviews, all the AB members identified training organised by JDS as very important. They emphasised that the training has equipped them with relevant knowledge – i.e., the knowledge about legal institutions, relevant laws such as the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act (2005) and other stakeholders such as lawyers and psychotherapists. This point is underscored by an AB member, AN who saw her elder sister severely abused in her in-laws' house. She told me that taking part in the training and obtaining relevant knowledge helped her become an AB member:

*In the (SW microfinance) meetings, I spoke out and engaged in discussion. Then, (a SW microfinance loan officer) HI di told me 'AN, you should come to take training of AB.'…I have seen from my childhood how oppression works. Nobody protests because they don't have the space to do it….Whenever I would see anybody fight or quarrel, I would go and talk to them. I would tell them to resolve their problems by talking them out. I was always brave enough but I never had an avenue through which I could actually do something…Then, I took the training for three months. We learnt a lot of things here which we couldn't as a child. (AN, an AB member)*

As shown above, even prior to the training, AN had capacities to hold discussion and for critical reflection. However, only by learning relevant knowledge through training, she became able to help women suffering violence.

While fully acknowledging the critical role that training has played in making them AB members, one of the founding members of AB, SS, draws attention to the importance of acquiring practical knowledge through actually acting to help victims:

*Initially, I did not know a lot about the work (of AB). That was the matter...We have learnt a lot and it's not just because of the training we took…Beyond the training, we have learnt a lot by actually doing a lot of work. While working, we have gained a lot of knowledge and learnt. We have learnt which path will lead us to where. We learnt a lot. Like, we go and talk to a magistrate if and when required. If any lawyer is being unscrupulous, we go and fight against him. In the past, we were unable to do that. So, we have learnt most of the things through experience. By regularly visiting (key institutions), we have gotten acquainted. (SS, an AB member)*

SS uses *'we'* to describe the development process of AB members' navigational capacity. This suggests that the capacity develops relationally by the team members' working together. Confirming the importance of practical action, a newly recruited member DP told me that having undergone the training, she is currently learning how AB supports victims by accompanying experienced members (e.g., SS, RM and BK) to courts and police stations. This further suggests that navigational capacity has spread from more experienced members to those less experienced in the group.

Similarly, the navigational capacity is indispensable for CD members' campaign. This is because disseminating the anti-child marriage messages into villages where the gendered social norms normalise child marriage is a highly complex task. As discussed in Chapter 5, initially, CD members' campaign failed as they did not engage in dialogue with villagers. Through trial and error as well as discussing with JDS staff and a professional trainer, CD members have become

gradually conscious of which strategies would bring about desired outcomes. In the interviews, recalling the process of their becoming full-fledged campaigners, CD members similarly emphasised the importance of relevant knowledge about legal systems and government schemes supportive for girls' education. Nonetheless, they also emphasised the importance of navigational capacity to make their campaign more effective at each juncture of CD's journey:

*(Earlier), we said we will go to different schools. Then, we started thinking what more can be done for girls. For example, the girls who are school dropouts, or those who are going out to work due to economic constraints – another team should be formed for them. (Consequently,) the MK group (for teenage girls) has just been formed. One after the other, we used to decide, we ourselves said in the meetings (in JDS), '(To female JDS staff) didi, if we do this, it will be good.' 'If we do that, it will be good.' Then, we can reach there or accomplish the goal…After that, in the support group meetings which are taking place now (in villages)…we ourselves used to discuss…if we do this, we can reach the root causes and stop the marriage or the gap between mothers and daughters, how that can be filled in. (MM, an AB member)*

The quotation above shows that while the training equipped them with the capacity to hold discussion and for critical reflection as well as relevant knowledge, the CD members had to decide how and when they utilise the capacities in each context. Again, in the case of CD, the development of navigational capacity has taken place relationally by working as a team. This is shown by MM's use of *'we'* to describe the progress of CD's campaign. It is also noteworthy that while CD members started their campaign by receiving advice from JDS staff, as their navigational capacity develops, they began to take the lead, proposing the strategies to the JDS staff.

The same development pattern of one's navigational capacity – through training and actually working – applies to JDS staff members. In contrast to CD members, many JDS staff had work experiences in relevant fields such as in feminist NGOs and other development organisations as of their joining JDS. As such, they had good navigational capacity even prior to their involvement in JDS. Nevertheless, due to the highly technical nature of JDS's work, all of them had to undergo some more training to be well-versed both in technical (e.g., microfinance, agriculture, and business management) and ideological (i.e., rights and gender) aspects of the work. In addition, they had to actually work in the field as a team to become able to implement the programs they are in charge of and the toward-gender-equality campaigns. Even AP, a senior JDS staff member in charge of Women's and Girls' Rights program, who studied Master of Social Work and had work experiences in feminist NGOs prior to joining JDS, is not an exception. In the interview, AP

explained to me that after undergoing training and actually working in the field, she has become capable of having a grasp of how each work contributes to the promotion of gender justice:

*So, those of us who work are closely associated with the women's movement. The networks that we have, like the ones against sexual violence – ' from 10 to 10,000 ' network is there, Maitree is there.*[35] *Whether it is through the networks or individually, we do work for the movements and are directly associated with it through our own work. Earlier, I wouldn't understand the depth of what I was doing and would keep on thinking 'What am I doing by going there regularly?'...But now I understand the work and what the objectives are behind it. I didn't have much clarity in my understanding of the different things we work with. My vision wasn't clear. I would deal with whatever came my way but didn't have the empathy to understand it completely…In the last two years, I have received a lot of training and gone for various exposure visits. Hence, the vision and depth that is required to work here has been possible for me…I have also learnt how to manage or handle a team...Since AB, CD, etc. work in groups and I too am a member of those... So how to work with a group, it's management, understanding its needs, this is a learning process for me. Now, I understand how I need to work with the group – what I can say to whom and when. (AP, a senior JDS staff member)*

There are two important points pertaining to the further development of AP's navigational capacity. Firstly, despite having relevant knowledge, AP was unable to visualise how each of her work would contribute to the promotion of gender justice. This finding points to the necessity of building navigational capacity of NGO workers, not only that of the marginalised, going beyond Appadurai's argument (2004). Secondly, while training and exposure visits organised by JDS were critical, working as a team with the so-called marginalised people – i.e., AB and CD members – equally played a critical role in developing AP's navigational capacity further.

The discussion of this section demonstrated that the emerging navigational capacity is indispensable for the emergence and evolution of the SCP. It drew attention to the fact that for the development of the capacity, both relevant knowledge obtained through training and practical work in the field are necessary. It also underscored that navigational capacity develops relationally through training, discussion and working as a team.

Through the discussions thus far, I identified the three emerging capacities – critical reflection, capacity to hold discussion and navigational capacity – as

[35] 10 to 10,000 network is a Kolkata-based forum comprised of feminists, academics and members of NGOs, working on violence against women and girls and women's rights in general. Some feminists broke off from Maitree and set up this 10 to 10,000 network.

necessary for the SCP to emerge. The discussion highlighted that these emerging capacities are interlinked with each other and develop through interpersonal interactions, resulting in the development of agency of the SCP members. Despite these findings, I have yet to explore how quite diverse individuals have come together and can stay cohesive, resulting in the emergence of this SCP. Thus, I now move on to analyse another critical factor which gives cohesion to the SCP members by guiding their use of the three emerging capacities.

**3. Compassion for people who are suffering and passion for gender justice**

Compassion for people who are suffering and passion for gender justice is another critical factor which is indispensable for the emergence of the SCP. These emotions play a critical role in rendering otherwise diverse individuals in the SCP cohesive and prompting them to act even in the face of obstacles. In the interviews, all those involved in this SCP told me that they have faced difficulties in engaging and continuing their activities: the scale of the problem has daunted many of them, family problems have made it difficult for some to come out of home to work, anti-social gangs threatened some members' lives, and lack of financial support posed enormous challenges to continue their activities. In the face of such difficulties, the majority of the SCP members emphasised that it is compassion for people who are suffering and passion for promoting gender justice that has given them the strength and motivation to continue their activities.

Before I analyse how these emotions have contributed to the emergence of the SCP, I would like to draw attention to an important point. As will be demonstrated shortly, these emotions are neither irrational nor context-independent. They are inextricably linked with people's capacity for critical reflection on real-world contexts where actual people – whom they know personally – are suffering. That is, compassion of the SCP members derives from observing actual people's dignity being violated, and their passion for promoting gender justice comes from their determination to do something for these people.

The importance of compassion for people who are suffering and passion for gender justice was highlighted throughout the interviews with all the AB members. As mentioned in Chapter 5, the work of AB requires technical knowledge of the legal system and entails harassment and threats by anti-social gangs, but the stipend is minimal. According to RM an AB member with 15 years of experience, some members left the group because of the risks involved. In addition, the inadequate financial support for the group has caused difficulties for many members to continue their activities. Nevertheless, some members did not give up and have sustained the group. In the interviews, all of them talked about the importance of 'helping people and victims' and told me that doing so gives them good feelings. For instance, AN, an AB member, explained why she decided to join the group as follows:

*Even before I underwent the training, I had seen my elder sister being severely tortured at her in-laws' house. They would beat up my elder sister so much. We – my brother and I – were young back then…One time, she was made to stand in the middle of a pond in the cold water…I have seen her getting tortured with my own eyes. She had really long hair. Her husband would drag her by her hair…My sister was given a lot of things during her marriage – gold, sarees...but they wouldn't let her wear her shoes while going out…I used to ask why (this happens)? I told my sister…'in the morning, we will leave (the in-laws' house)'…The next morning when my brother-in-law was in the fields, we began walking (leaving the in-laws' house). Somehow, he came to know it and took my sister back home. He chased us away and told us 'Tell everyone at home that your sister is dead.' Then, they poisoned her…They mixed the poison with cow's milk. She had gone into a spasm when my brother found her. They had all abandoned her and left the house…Since then, whenever I see any woman being tortured, I get shaken up. That is something that pains me a lot. I have come from there, and taken the training. (AN, an AB member)*

AN developed strong feelings of compassion for victims and passion for gender justice because an important person for her – elder sister – was nearly killed due to domestic violence. With these critical emotions, AN decided to become an AB member to help victims of violence. In the context of rural West Bengal, going out to help victims is a radical thing which causes disruption in existing relationships with people around her. Confirming this concern, in the interview, AN told me that anti-social gangs with guns came to her home when she was dealing with a rape case. She also explained to me that some of her female neighbours used to come in group to criticise her whenever something happens in her neighbourhood. Thus, I asked why she remained to be an AB member despite the risks of being attacked and harassment. AN answered:

*Many women go through so much torture and abuse…I try to make their lives a little bit better. I try to help them find their way…I try to find solutions to their problems. My father sold his land for my sister's marriage. He gave the husband's family so much money and still that happened. She still didn't find any happiness. This keeps on happening to women. I feel good when I am able to provide support to such women…so that they can stand on their own two feet and change their lives for the better. (AN, an AB member)*

Stressing that oppression of women happens systematically, AN demonstrates very strong sense of compassion for women who are suffering and passion for gender justice – which potentially counter-balances her fear of being attacked and

harassed. It is noteworthy that AN gains emotional fulfilment through helping women victims as if she redeems the pain of having been unable to help her own sister when she was a child.

The importance of compassion for people who are suffering and passion for gender justice was also emphasised by many JDS staff members. In the interviews, JDS staff admitted that their work is not easy as they have to be well-versed in both the technical and ideological aspects. RJ, the director of JDS, confessed to me that the salary for his employees is by no means high but some staff end up doing overtime work and they do so out of passion. The key emotion of passion for gender justice has emerged in the course of working at JDS amongst the vast majority of JDS staff members. Through the training at JDS organised for its staff members and actually working with villagers as well as AB and CD members, they came to develop compassion for people who are suffering and passion for promoting gender justice. This is exemplified by IR, a senior JDS staff member. When she was studying commerce in the university, she aspired to become a stenographer. Having completed her studies, she found a job opportunity in JDS and applied for it. In the interview, she explained the difficulties of carrying out her work and told me that:

*I get the motivation from here only. A lot of times, when I have gone to the field, I have seen a woman who has worked very hard all day in the field is getting beaten up by her husband. Sometimes, I speak up but sometimes I don't…because it is not always possible to do so. I feel very bad when I see all this. There was another incident in my village, where a young girl (who was associated with JDS) had died and I came to know about that on the television. It made me cry…and it took me a lot of time to overcome that. Whenever I pass by that girl's coaching centre where she used to go study…it breaks my heart and I imagine her standing there like before. So, yes…such things do affect us, but then I concentrate on my work and that makes me feel better. When loan officers come up to me and tell me that they talked to the bank manager and solved whatever problem there at the bank*[36]*…That makes me feel good, because earlier they did not know anything about all this and also could not do all this by themselves. (IR, a senior JDS staff member)*

IR's statement above shows that her seeing women and girls suffer affects her strongly at an emotional level, putting her in distress. However, more importantly, her compassion for their undeserved suffering gives her strength to negotiate this distress and eventually transforms itself into passion to work for them. IR also finds that working to make their lives better is the way to relieve her own distress, meaning that her interaction with them prompts her to develop further her own agency.

[36] Loan officers are female villagers who are in charge of collecting and depositing money at bank.

Finally, the importance of compassion for people who are suffering and passion for gender justice was also highlighted throughout the interviews with the CD members. As mentioned in Chapter 5, most CD members are victims of violence and/or child marriage. Prior to their contact to JDS, they kept their patience and simply tried to come to terms with what they were going through. Nevertheless, undergoing the training, actually working in the field as a team, and interacting with villagers, they began to develop the three emerging capacities and passion for gender justice. In contrast to many AB members and JDS staff (who are not victims), CD members' compassion for people who are suffering is directed both toward themselves and other women. This is evident in the interviews as CD members talk about their personal growth and positive changes happening to women in operational villages in an intertwined way:

*Everybody used to hit me a lot previously (in her in-law's house)…I told MX di (a JDS staff member) that I wanted to work although I have not studied much…The condition of my house was terrible (due to poverty and abuse). I was really eager to work and revolt against all these…They used to abuse me just because I had two daughters. They would not give me any food. At that time, MX di and IC di, asked me to join the (JDS) office (as a CD member). Then, I started revolting against the abuses that were directed towards me. I started working for stopping this condition where every day thousands of girls were getting abused, just like me. Also, young girls were being married off, which I wanted to stop. I had myself faced the harsh consequences of early and child marriage. (DM, a CD member)*

DM's statement clearly shows that her compassion for victims and passion for gender justice are directed toward both herself and many other women. It also shows that what has driven the victim – DM – to become a CD member are these key emotions coupled with her realisation that she and other many women suffer from the oppression. The link between her personal struggle at home and professional work in CD is also evident. This is because she began to fight back against her in-laws by referring to the criminality of abuses and the presence of effective legal system to punish criminals. When she talked about this radical action, she repeatedly invoked her determination to protect her two daughters from abuse and let them pursue tertiary education, instead of marrying them off. It appears that she redeemed her suffering of being married off and abused through protecting her daughters and working for many other women. This shows that her compassion and passion develop relationally.

The discussion of this section demonstrated that compassion for people who are suffering and passion for gender justice are indispensable for the emergence of this SCP. It highlighted that these critical emotions guide the SCP members' use of the three emerging capacities toward promoting gender justice. It also shed light on the

relational nature of their development – that is, compassion and passion emerge from the SCP members' interactions with actual people, and certain interpersonal relations enhance the development of these emotions. Thus, summing up the discussions thus far, I posit that when the SCP emerges and evolves, the agency of its members also develops, and this requires the three emerging capacities to be fuelled by their compassion and passion.

In the next section, among the manifold relationships people are embedded, I explore *enabling interpersonal relationships* conducive to the emergence and evolution of this SCP.

## 4. Enabling interpersonal relationships

The final critical factor necessary for the SCP to emerge and evolve is enabling interpersonal relationships. As I have illustrated throughout this chapter, interpersonal relationships are manifold. Some are abusive and undermine the SCP members' agency while others are enabling, conducive to the emergence and evolution of the SCP. Here, I draw attention to enabling ones and among these, I firstly explore the relationships amongst the SCP members.

### 4.1 Relationships amongst the SCP members

Relationships amongst the SCP members are foundational for the SCP because they forge the coherence that has made quite diverse people united as the SCP. In addition, as suggested thus far, these relationships provide a nurturing ground for the emerging capacities as well as compassion and passion.

AB members place importance on their relationships with JDS staff. All of them draw attention that the relationships are enabling. This is because the training organised by JDS staff has played a critical role in making them to capable of handling cases of violence through developing their emerging capacities. Going beyond this, MN emphasised the two sides of AB members' relationships with JDS staff: on the one hand, the relationships give them strong motivation for their work, and on the other, the relationships are experienced as enabling them to be themselves:

*During that time (in the early 2000), we did not receive any money. But, now gradually and gradually, we receive the traveling allowance. However, our motivation and energy for doing the work has always remained the same…The main motivator behind our energy has been the didis (female JDS staff)…In JDS, there have been many meetings, marches and protests, plays, songs...I mean, we have relaxed. We have come here and relaxed as if we have no sorrows. (MN, an AB member)*

MN's statement well captures the reciprocal relationships between AB members and JDS staff which have given the collective strength to the SCP. That is, when AB members work with passion, JDS staff respond with technical and financial support for AB. MN also draws attention that the relationships give 'play' time to AB members who, as rural women, have to fulfil household duties and, in helping victims, face challenges. The importance of 'play' time is emphasised by many AB members, which shows that this social time strengthens their commitment to helping victims and makes the SCP more powerful.

For CD similarly, interpersonal relationships with JDS staff have been critical in forging the coherence that has made it part of the SCP. This is because not only JDS staff tailored training for them on a regular basis but also guided CD members with passion throughout the group's journey:

*From the beginning, MX di (a female JDS staff member) was with us. For us, completely…A to Z…she herself used to guide us. How we will do something or not do. She used to inform us. After that, how the work can be done for achieving what…She used to sit with us and discuss about what can be done. She was totally like a friend. (MM, a CD member)*

MM's statement clearly shows that CD members' relationship with the female JDS staff was critical for the emerging capacities amongst CD members to develop. It also highlights that the JDS staff's passion to support the group was felt by CD members who responded to it by actively engaging in their campaign. This suggests that the reciprocal relationship between them provided a nurturing ground where the agency of CD members developed and the collective strength of CD grew, making the SCP more powerful.

For AB members, the relationships amongst the group members also strengthen their commitment to helping victims by giving them a sense of identity and fulfilment. Many AB members describe the relationships as 'important bonds', and told me that when they come together, they have fun and happiness. Their calling the relationships 'important bonds' is not an exaggeration. In the fieldwork, I observed that AB members are close at the personal level and go out together for a picnic, friends' house or charity events. The importance of the bonds amongst AB members was underscored by BK who was introduced by SS, one of the founding members of AB, to the group:

*In 2009, I came to take the training. During that time, I was a little scared about what to say and what to do. I didn't understand anything. But, gradually I started to mingle with everybody (in AB). Then, I felt that they are my friends and they are my own people. So, you can say anything here and in my mind, there were many things which I could not say. I stay in a village, so people might see me in a negative*

*light (if I say whatever in my mind). I was worried about this. But after coming to AB, all that completely…as if I became lighter. This is the place where I can say whatever is in my mind. In this way, gradually, while working with them, we have mingled. If we cannot talk over the phone for a single day, we don't feel good. If we don't see each other for a day, we don't feel good. If everyone does not come to the meeting, we don't feel good because of that. When everyone is together, we shout, talk, enjoy and feel good. We are fond of this. (BK, an AB member)*

When I observed the monthly meeting of AB in January 2018, I was surprised by the fact that the members were candidly exchanging their opinions about a case of violence. I felt that this would be possible due to the high level of trust amongst them. Furthermore, it merits due attention that BK describes her relationships with the members as '*they are my own people.'* In Bengali language, this is a very strong statement. BK used the word '*apon*'(i.e., own) and this expresses very strong affinity, most commonly within one's immediate family (e.g., one's own brother). A woman's marital home, for example, only gradually comes to be described as *'apon',* usually after having children. Thus, BK's statement is significant because despite having no immediate kin connection, for BK, AB members are her *own* people. What follows from this is that BK has come to experience a new sense of her own identity by being herself with the other like-minded AB members. In addition, BK's agency has been significantly enabled by her bonds with other AB members. My analysis of fieldwork data suggests that not only BK, but many other AB members have gained a new sense of identity and fulfilment by working together, and their agency has been significantly enabled. This signifies that a dual process is going on: the interpersonal relationships being foundational, AB members gain a new sense of their own identity and fulfilment, and simultaneously, the collective strength of AB as a group grows, making it integral part of the SCP.

Similarly, the importance of the growing bonds amongst CD members is underscored by both PC, the trainer for CD and a CD member, MC. In the interview, PC emphasised that interpersonal relationships amongst CD members have enabled their agency and forged the coherence that has made them part of the SCP:

*This space (of monthly Strategy Planning Meeting for CD) has also given the members the opportunity to forge bonds with each other. There have been times when one group members has reached out to another in her hour of need. They have been friends, sisters and mentors for each other. They have drawn upon each other's strengths to deal with difficult situations. (PC, the trainer for CD)*

Similarly, MC explained to me the importance of the growing bonds among CD members:

*My work – I love them (CD members) very much. This is the main thing in my life. I mean, it's my purpose and I am here for and because of it. I haven't done anything before this, you know. (MC, a CD member)*

MC's statement is remarkable because in the context of rural West Bengal, people, especially women, place strong emphasis on family as primary relationship and source of meaning in life. In the interview, MC told me that in the past, she was scared to go out from home and had never engaged in any activities (such as work) outside. Nevertheless, through her becoming a CD member and mixing with other CD members, she found a life goal and obtained confidence to act for attaining the goal. The impact of her transformation has extended beyond the bounds of CD itself, enabling her to become a coordinator of MN group for teenage girls and to open her own dance club for girls in her neighbourhood in Shakti. Thus, it seems that MC's obtaining a new sense of her own identity as a CD member and the development of her agency go in tandem with the growth of the SCP's collective strength.

Similarly, JDS staff identify their relationships amongst themselves as enabling, giving them strength to keep on working. In the interview, RJ told me that holding an annual training session for his employees and thereby forging a sense of team is very important for promoting JDS's goal of gender equality:

*I think the passion comes when you work with a team that is passionate. So, when your colleagues are also interested, they want to do something, then you also make a leap forward into that (goal). So, it is important to... I think to keep that going. And keep pumping it up once a year through trainings or refreshers. Once a year in an organised way, but otherwise monthly staff meetings, interactions whatever...but to remember the objective and the goal which is a more gender equitable and just, sustainable society. It is a very simple term but that's the big goal. (RJ, the director of JDS)*

RJ's statement not only underscores the importance of each staff members' passion to promote gender justice but also bringing this critical emotion together in order for attaining the goal. To this end, RJ seems to be arguing that training plays a critical role as a nurturing ground where the staff's common experiences (e.g., witnessing people who are suffering, having compassion for them, and developing passion for gender justice) are shared through dense interactions among them. He also underscores that once their sense of team is forged through affirming each other's experiences and determination to act for the goal, they become capable of doing more which an individual alone can never do. This suggests that the relationships amongst JDS staff strengthen their agency as well as the collective strength of the SCP.

RJ's emphasis on the importance of the sense of team amongst JDS staff strongly resonates with the empowering work experience of DR, a senior JDS staff member:

*Initially, even I had some doubts about whether I would be able to work or not because I have a daughter of my own... I had to pay for her education and everything... I am currently separated from my husband. There was a time when I used to live with him but then JDS helped me make this decision, so I left. Because I thought, when so many women can get out of such situations...why can't I? So, JDS gave me a lot of confidence. I got a lot of confidence and power in myself that I have to look after my daughter, my mother, my father…Along with that, I have been able to create a place for myself in JDS too where everybody treats me with respect…gives me a lot of love. And because of this, I have been able to make a transition from a field worker to a coordinator. (DR, a senior JDS staff member)*

DR articulates that her relationships with JDS staff as well as village women have enabled her to do the things that she alone was probably unable to do. The quote shows that these achievements consist of both her professional work and personal struggle in her marital life. It seems that as DR's agency develops because of the enabling relationships, dual changes have taken place – i.e., DR has become a key worker in JDS, making the SCP more powerful, and DR has managed to leave her husband, taking care of her family on her own.

The discussion thus far drew attention that interpersonal relationships amongst the SCP members are critical for the emergence and evolution of the SCP and the development of agency of its members. Nonetheless, as DR's statement suggests, there is another type of enabling relationships – that is, the SCP members' relationships with villagers.

### 4.2 Relationships with villagers

The SCP members' relationships with villagers play a critical role in making the SCP more powerful by strengthening its members' passion to engage in the movement. It should be noted that the SCP members' relationships with villagers were not enabling by default – because of the continuous activities by the SCP members, these enabling relationships have been established.

Many of CD members regard their relationships with villagers as enabling as the relationships give them strength to engage in their activities with passion. This is highlighted by SD whose passion to engage in the activities currently comes primarily from her relationships with villagers. As mentioned in Chapter 5, at the beginning, CD members' relationships with villagers were, by no means, enabling. Nevertheless, SD told me that the group's several years of activities brought about a significant shift in the relationships:

*Now if I go – we have support meetings once a month – the village women ask us 'Didi, when will you come? Why aren't you coming? You are coming right?'… 'SD-di has to come'…There is so much love from the people in the villages that we don't mind that we are paid a miniscule amount of money. I love my work so much. I love it so much that I want to spend my life in it. The money isn't important. I love the work and when I get this love and feedback from the villages I feel really good. I keep thinking when will I be able to go back to the villages? That's how I feel. I really love my work. (SD, a CD member)*

The change which CD brought about is significant: villagers who once complained about and ridiculed CD members now look forward to seeing them. The transformed relationships motivate SD to engage in the activities with so much passion that she even identifies CD's activities as her life work. In the interview, SD often contrasted the traumatic experiences she underwent as a victim of child marriage with the achievements she has made through CD's activities. This indicates that by being needed and loved by village women, SD's long-lasting emotional needs have been fulfilled and consequently, she obtained a new sense of identity as a person. Thus, dual processes seem to be going on: as SD obtains her own identity, CD's activities become more powerful and the collective strength of the SCP grows.

The same importance of interpersonal relationships with villagers is highlighted throughout the interviews with AB members. AB members' relationships with villagers seem to entail 'respect' from the latter to the former, and this positive recognition gives the AB members a strong motivation to engage in the activities with passion. RM, proudly told me the positive changes that she has brought about through AB's activities as follows:

*For example, I have been interviewed several times on television about my legal activities. As a result, I have gained a lot of respect. My neighbours have seen me on television. Back then, I did not have a SW (microfinance) group in my village. At Karagram bus stop, I had done a play and people had seen all these. After seeing all these, many people have gotten involved with my SW (microfinance) group. They do group activities. Then, we have RM ... if there is any problem, they run and come to me for help. If anyone has any problem, I mean, they come to me. Now, most of the people have become aware of me. The biggest thing is this – everyone knows that I am RM. Previously, RM had to use the name of her guardian. Nobody knew RM. If you asked who is RM…people did not know. Now, if you say RM works for a Mohila Shamini (i.e., AB), everyone recognises RM. I don't need to mention my father's name. I also do not need to mention my family name anymore. This is the condition at present. (RM, an AB member)*

From the point of no substantial relationships, RM established enabling relationships with village women through her continuous activities. The transformed relationships have made village women identify RM a prominent AB member. This is significant because in rural West Bengal, women's names are often not known. When a woman is unmarried, she is referred to in relationship to her father, and once she is married, she is referred to as a wife of her husband or/and if she has a son, as his mother. By being recognised as RM, she developed a strong sense of her own meaning and identity as an AB member who tackles abuse and help victims. As mentioned, RM is separated from her husband after years of abuse. Thus, it seems that this change of social role – from victim to an AB member – is *'the biggest thing'* for RM because she does not have to stick to the disempowering identity as a woman victim any longer. It is also noteworthy that RM obtained a strong sense of her own identity through her relationships with village women, and simultaneously, the collective strength of the SCP has grown, involving these women into the SCP's activities.

Similarly, JDS staff show that their relationships with villagers significantly enable their agency to work for gender justice with passion. This is exemplified by AP, a senior JDS staff member in charge of Women's and Girls' Rights Program. In the interview, AP told me that she often gets depressed because she has to see women in extreme distress on a daily basis through her work. Being asked why she can continue this demanding work, she emphasised that not only interpersonal relationships among JDS staff but also with victims of violence and child marriage from villages enable her to stand up for gender justice:

*The thing about working in JDS is that no matter what kind of challenges come our way, it is never completely on just one person. It always gets distributed and since we work in a team and in JDS the work environment is very good…And also with the groups and the community. A personal relationship automatically gets formed with them (i.e., victims of violence and child marriage) because…their day to day fights are shared with us. We also receive our share of strength for their fights that 'no, despite everything, she is able to fight'. Hence, we too find our strength from the survivors. It's not just that we work with them and train them but we also receive our strength from them...that how a girl can come such a long way from where she was. That is also our strength. (AP, a senior JDS staff member)*

The relationships between AP and victims are reciprocally enabling. On the one hand, the relationships strengthen AP's agency to act for them, negotiating her distress. On the other hand, victims fight for justice in the face of hardship with the support by AP. It seems that the victims she mentions include some AB and CD members as AP says *'train them'*. This suggests that reciprocally enabling

relationships within SCP members are a web which underpin the collective strength of this SCP. It is also noteworthy that these relationships transformed AP at the personal level. In the interview, AP told me that by working in JDS, she has seen changes occur in her personal life and family, and has taken certain decisions which she still follows. Even in AP's case, there exists a spill over from the development of her agency at the professional level into her personal life and her family.

### 4.3 AB and CD members' relationships at home

Thus far, I have explored two types of relationships enabling for the SCP: relationships among the SCP members and their relationships with villagers. My analysis of fieldwork data further suggests that AB and CD members' relationships at home – i.e., their relationships with husband and in-laws – are also critical for the SCP. Firstly, in West Bengal, these women's availability for activities outside of their home is significantly influenced by the objection or support of their family (in particular their husbands). As discussed in Chapter 5, in this area of rural West Bengal, despite recent relaxation in norms, women's going out of home is still severely discouraged. In particular, married women are expected to stay at home dealing with a huge amount of household chores, and in case they wish to come out of home, they have to ask permission from their family, in particular, their husbands.[37]

Some AB members say that many members left the group partly because of the family pressure. For all but one of the current AB members, their family either supports or allows their taking part in the activities of the SCP. While many members refer to their husband as someone who allows them to go out for the activities as long as they do household chores, four members emphasise the strong support given by their husband. For instance, TG emphasises how the support by her husband has enabled her to begin and continue her activities as an AB member:

*(Researcher: Are household expenses borne by your husband?) Yes, my husband does that...If my husband had not supported, he would have said, 'You will come back and give me money in my hand, only then you can go and work.' If you don't give money, does any husband allow one to work? But, my husband helps me so I can come out and work…My husband also cooks. (TG, an AB member)*

All the interviewed CD members were married as of January 2018 but the degree of support their husband has given varied considerably among the members. According to the interviews, two members have very supportive husbands who

[37] The interviews with AB members show that many of them live as a nuclear family without staying with their in-laws or their in-laws have already passed away. On the other hand, many CD members live with their in-laws. In either case, they told me that when they go out, they seek permission from their husbands.

encourage them to engage in the CD's activities. Two other members' husbands, despite their possible dissatisfaction, allow the women to work as CD members. And three other CD members have faced strong opposition by their husband but one of them made her husband cooperative:

*Initially, my husband didn't support me and refused to acknowledge. But then I told him that 'I wish to do this. There are a lot of things that I don't do, if it's against your wishes. But, I want to do this.'... Nowadays I have come out for the 3 day trainings, one day training, and even been to Shantiniketan, Uttar Pradesh, Digha, Jharkhand. That is, now I can leave all household duties to my husband and attend all of these, and this is a big thing to gain. To see a man take care of the household for a week is a big thing to me. Earlier, he would do nothing. After I joined CD, my husband has learnt a lot of things. He has learnt how to cook and this is a big help to me. (JS, a CD member)*

JS's quote draws attention to two important points. Firstly, relationships are fluid and through continuous actions and discussions for a significant period of time, they can be transformed so as to be enabling. Secondly, JS underwent transformation by being part of the SCP and the change has spread to her family members. The spill over effect is further confirmed by her telling me that her son has become an eloquent speaker who questions and argues against sexist remarks by her husband.

In addition, AB and CD members' availability for the activities of the SCP is significantly influenced by the financial security at home and the point they are at in the life cycle (particularly with regards to pregnancy and child rearing). In the interviews, the AB members in their 60s told me that they can focus on the activities of AB because their children are grown up, help with household chores and support them financially. However, they explained to me that they faced difficulties in continuing to be involved in the SCP when they were rearing their children. The AB members in their 30s and 40s admit that because of the small amount of stipend given by JDS, they make a living by selling miscellaneous items, running their own shop or factory, tailoring and working as a beautician. There are also a few AB members who engage in farming along with their husbands. The members in their 30s and 40s also explained to me that the being an AB member necessitates them to be away from home for such a long time that they have to leave their children to nursery school or other family members. SS emphasised how critical financial security and life cycle are for one's availability for AB's activities. In so doing, she also drew attention to the fact that having supportive family relationship – which she has at the moment – can minimise these difficulties and enable them to focus on their activities as AB members:

*They left. There were many such people who left the group. You know why they left? Sometimes it is because of the money factor. So money is an important matter, to tell you the truth. After my husband passed away, my only aim was to make my children full-fledged. I had already gotten my son full-fledged and he is now working. After that, I got my daughter married in 2009 and she is working as a teacher. I got my son married two years ago…So, all of my children are working now…That is why at home, I am free and I am doing a lot more work – this AB work. I am fond of doing this social work. My son does not tell me anything regarding my doing this. (SS, an AB member)*

It merits due attention that despite having brought the children up and arranged their marriages all on her own, SS still feels that she needs her son's approval to engage in AB's activities. This underscores the substantial impact that AB members' relationships with family members – in particular, with husband and son – have on their availability for AB's activities.

Similarly, even in the case of the CD members, the financial security at home and their life cycle (i.e. pregnancy and child rearing) significantly affect the availability for AB's activities. In the interviews, CD members told me that since its formation in 2002, many members left the group. According to the current CD members, these women had left the group for different reasons including the low stipend, but the majority left due to the difficulties deriving from their life cycle: at least three members left because they got married, at least two members could not continue to work because they had babies and one member is technically on leave from the work because of pregnancy. In other cases, CD members have managed to continue the work with the help of their family. In the case of PN, her strong bond with her husband – who even left his natal home to save her from the abuse by his own mother – played a critical role in helping her to join CD when she had a baby:

*I heard the news that there's a job offer – job training will be provided – a women's issue oriented job. On hearing that, I was very pleased, and I thought to myself 'Let me go there and see if it works out.'…I had a baby daughter at that time (in 2002), who was only 4 months old. So, at that time I was being thoroughly held back from going, but my husband said 'Go if you can handle it… you can leave your daughter at home and go' …So, at that time, I kept my daughter at home and came here. (PN, a CD member)*

While her availability was severely limited by being the mother of a newly born baby, her relationship with the supportive husband enabled PN to come out of home and work for CD. This suggests that PN has been able to bring about all the positive

changes in villages together other CD members because of her relationship with her husband.

The discussions thus far demonstrated that there are three types of enabling relationships for the SCP. The most important and foundational ones are the relationships among the SCP members. The relationships enable the SCP members to experience being treated as themselves, to obtain a new sense of identity as persons, and to engage in the SCP's activities with passion. The relationships are a web which underpins the collective strength of the SCP by providing a nurturing ground where the agency of the SCP members develop.

The discussion also brought to light the SCP members' relationships with villagers which became enabling through their continuous activities over the years. The relationships played a critical role in motivating SCP members to engage in the SCP's activities with passion, and simultaneously empowering the villagers. The relationships also significantly contributed to the SCP members' obtaining their own identities as campaigners and persons and giving the collective strength to the SCP.

Finally, the AB and CD members' relationships at home are important for them to engage in the groups' activities as these are critical for the development of their agency and the growth of the SCP's collective strength. Nevertheless, even in the case of their absence, some members worked hard through discussion and actions and eventually transformed the existing unsupportive home relationships into enabling ones.

## 5. Conclusion

In contrast to Sen's identification of a person's agency – which he sees as an individual property – with justice-promoting changes, in this chapter, I demonstrated that the collective strength of this SCP is built through *relational agency*. The exploration confirmed that 'in the beginning' of this SCP 'there is the relation' (Donati, 2011, cited by Burkitt, 2018, p. 523) and this SCP produces particular effects in the world and on its members through their relational connection and in joint actions (Burkitt, 2016, 2018).

It is true that currently, this SCP consists of AB and CD members and JDS staff with exceptional capacities. They are capable of engaging in critical reflection, have the capacity to hold discussion even in the face of obstacles and demonstrate impressive navigational capacity. They also have a very strong sense of compassion for people who are suffering and passion for gender justice. Thus, in this chapter, I theorised that the agency of the SCP members actualises through their exercising these capacities fuelled by compassion for people who are suffering and passion for gender justice.

Nevertheless, the exploration drew attention that both the SCP members' capacities and critical emotions have come to develop through their interactions and

establishing enabling relationships with those in the SCP and outside of it (e.g., villagers and family). The exploration further illuminated that the development of their agency and the emergence and evolution of the SCP take place concomitantly, reinforcing each other. Figure 1 below illustrates this dynamic operation of the SCP's emergence and evolution as well as the development of its member's agency.

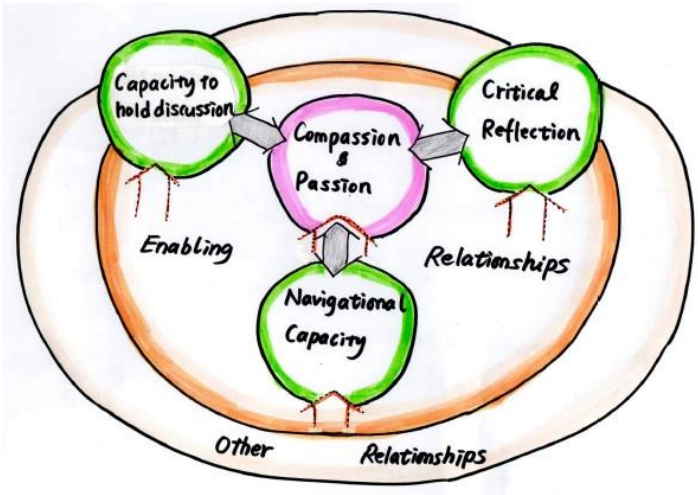


Figure 1. How the SCP emerges and evolves, and the agency of those involved in it develops

In making this proposition of *relational agency*, I have to reflect on some methodological limitations. Firstly, I must admit the difficulty of attributing the development of the SCP members' agency only to their involvement in this SCP. This possibility of external factors' contribution applies, in particular, to many AB members who have been involved in government programs such as Anondodhara, jobs in Block Development Office and Legal Aid, Charity Project for Slum Children organised by West Bengal Child Ministry, and Panchayat Literacy Programs. My analysis of fieldwork data suggests that the AB members' participation in the programs facilitated their agency development by nurturing some of the emerging capacities (i.e., critical reflection, capacity to hold discussion and navigational capacity).

Secondly, as discussed in Chapter 4, the findings cannot be taken in an absolute term because the research stopped short of interviewing all the SCP members (N=34 out of 42). It is important to remember the possibility that the members who were not interviewed could have indicated other capacities, emotions or relationships as critical for the emergence and evolution of this SCP.

Thirdly, as discussed in Chapter 4, people, in general, tend to exaggerate their agency and see themselves as agents who can make their own decisions (Mahony, 2018). Being interviewed as SCP members who fight against gender injustice, they may have been even more inclined to tell me accounts to highlight their agency while downplaying their actual passivity. Similarly, researchers wishing to see

evidence of empowerment tend to exaggerate people's agency, seeing them as agents of their own destiny (ibid). Thus, despite my efforts to be reflective, I might have ended up underscoring the SCP members' agency in analysing data and writing this chapter. Therefore, it is important to remember that the findings may be biased toward emphasising the SCP members' agency.

# Chapter 7 Reflection and conclusion

## 1. Introduction

This thesis is concerned with the idea of justice and how theoretical debates may contribute to the reduction of injustice in practice. It started with the critical view that many contemporary theorists of justice discuss very little about how their ideal theorisation could be conducive to promoting justice in practice. This thesis built on Sen and other capability theorists' attempts to reorient justice theorising from ideal to practice so as to offer a practical guide to reduce injustice. To this end, the thesis engaged in both philosophical discussion and empirical exploration, and synthesised the outcome of each into *a theoretical model for reducing injustice*.

In the first place, I argued that in order to develop a theoretical model, a thorough philosophical discussion of the idea of justice and how it can be promoted in practice is necessary. This is because the debates on these matters are still ongoing and attempts to settle them remain contentious. In the second place, I drew attention to the necessity of empirical exploration by applying the theoretical model to empirical contexts where justice-promoting struggles are taking place. I argued that this is necessary to examine whether injustice is actually reduced as theorised in the model. I also contended that gaining empirical findings from the exploration, the theoretical model needs to be further developed – otherwise, the model will remain detached from social reality, and thus may play very little role in serving as a practical guide to reduce injustice.

Thus, firstly, the application of the model to other scholars' empirical studies in Egypt and India was carried out. Secondly, using my own primary research on a justice-promoting struggle in rural West Bengal, another empirical exploration was conducted. Expanding beyond key findings from the first empirical exploration and utilising the fieldwork data, this second exploration focused on gaining an in-depth understanding of the struggle against injustice, which is key to further developing the model.

In this final chapter, I retrace the steps that the thesis took to develop the model and summarise its contribution to the long-lasting debates among theorists of justice. At the end of the chapter, I will also present a further developed version of the theoretical model informed by key findings from the empirical exploration. Then, the chapter concludes with discussing practical implications that the model offers for the promotion of justice.

## 2. Philosophical discussion of ways to reduce injustice in practice

In Chapter 2, the thesis embarked on philosophical discussion by reviewing a body of theories of justice. Its objective was to develop a theoretical model comprising the three building blocks: 1) a normative criterion, 2) a procedure to promote justice, and 3) a more grounded strategy in practice to actualise the efficacy of the procedure.

I set out the discussion by singling out the central part of the model, a procedure to promote justice – i.e., Sen's theoretical framework of justice.

Sen's theoretical framework of justice proposes that through public reasoning, people come to deliberate and discuss what capabilities should be promoted as public goals. To do this, the interlocutors do not have to agree on all the issues in society. They just have to reach an agreement on a capability to be promoted (or capability deprivation to be tackled), while leaving dissensus on the other issues aside. In reaching an agreement, the interlocutors can hold plural reasons for identifying a capability deprivation as injustice. Through such operation of public reasoning, the interlocutors will also identify an effective way to promote the capability, and this will result in an injustice-reducing change. Because of the concept of comprehensive outcomes, in Sen's framework, not only the outcome of public reasoning but also the process to reach it merits attention. In order to address the cases in which some appearance of justice is socially biased through the impact of entrenched social norms and local custom, Sen's framework has the concepts of open impartiality and impartial spectators. Sen holds that these conceptual devices will work, in his theoretical framework, to help people promote unbiased, right manifestations of justice by making them critically reflect on their beliefs in the eyes of the rest of mankind.

Therein, I argued that in contrast to ideal theories of justice which depict utopian societies with numerous idealisations, Sen's theoretical framework is a robust theoretical procedure to promote justice. This is, firstly, because Sen's framework is pragmatic and can be applied to real-world contexts. Secondly, Sen's framework is open-ended such that it can be used even as a building block of the theoretical model of this thesis, and other theories and concepts can be added to it if necessary. Thirdly, Sen's framework assigns an over-arching role to public reasoning and thereby well accommodates the matter of self-determination within its theoretical framework. The centrality of public reasoning also has a practical advantage of keeping open the space for dialogue among people who would conceive of the idea of justice in different ways yet may want to compromise on socio-political and economic issues.

Despite these great strengths, the discussion of Chapter 2 also drew attention to three limits in Sen's theoretical framework of justice. In the first place, it does not have a normative criterion by which the extent of justice may be evaluated. While the open-endedness of his framework is a strength, this characteristic can become a limitation when it is applied in practice. This is because the identification of injustices – including egregious injustices in Sen's view – tends to be contentious and thus it often happens that interlocutors in public reasoning cannot consensually identify injustice. One such instance is child labour. While some regard any form of child labour as the manifestation of injustice and try to abolish it, others condone it in some contexts where material deprivation is rampant. If a theoretical

framework intends to serve as a practical guide to reduce injustice, it should help people advance toward consensually identifying injustice even regarding the issue of child labour. Thus, a normative criterion is necessary which provides guidance as to what constitute injustice, and helps people think more clearly about the issue which is often perpetuated by different kinds of injustices.

Secondly, while Sen's concept of public reasoning is far more pragmatic than Rawls's, there remain some idealisations in Sen's. In practice, people with disadvantageous social standing tend to be excluded from and/or marginalised in public reasoning and interlocutors do not exercise public reason with open impartiality and impartial spectators. Further, in the actual public reasoning, interlocutors pay little attention to the voice of those disadvantaged and tend to conform to the dominant public opinion without raising radical dissent. Thus, I argued that these idealisations leave gaps between his theoretical framework and the actual operation of public reasoning, undermining the practical efficacy of his framework.

Thirdly, while Sen's focus on each person's impartial reasoning captures an important dimension of public reasoning, his over-individualised concept has a limitation. This is because, public reasoning in practice is multi-dimensional, comprising collective, inter-subjective and emotional dimensions. For instance, many injustice-reducing changes have been galvanised by collective action and entail different kinds of people's worldviews coming into dialogues. In addition, some studies show that people's emotions towards others significantly affect how well public reasoning works in the reduction of injustice. Without paying attention to these other dimensions of public reasoning, Sen's framework stops short of serving as a practical guide to reduce injustice.

In order to address these limits, I argued that Sen's theoretical framework needs to be augmented by two additional building blocks of *a normative criterion*, and *a more grounded strategy in practice* to actualise the efficacy of his framework.

Chapter 2 then proceeded to identify the most appropriate normative criterion for the theoretical model – i.e., the concept of equal dignity. Equal dignity refers to the idea that any person on earth is a proper object of respect and has supreme value by her/himself, just by virtue of being human, regardless of her/his position in society and particular characteristics. This broad yet normatively powerful concept has played an architectural role in contemporary theorisation of justice while it has been elaborated in different ways by theorists. Reviewing key egalitarian theorists' elaborations, I pointed out that despite the differences, they agree on its key constituents – that is, for one's dignity to be safeguarded, one, at least, needs to have the capacity of practical reason, political rights, and be free of material deprivation and social discrimination. The discussion also underscored the normative power of equal dignity in reference to its practical relevance. Often manifesting itself in the expression of human rights, it informed the constitutions

of many countries and international declarations and laws, and has significantly influenced social movements around the world. This discussion was followed by my argument that the concept of equal dignity is underlying Sen's theoretical framework because his framework accommodates human rights which are founded on the concept.

Then, I argued that the concept aptly augments Sen's framework when added to the model, not as a specification of an entirely just society, but as a broad normative criterion. Firstly, with the concept of equal dignity, the model now shows what constitute injustice and thus can provide guidance as to what counts as a more or less just states of affairs. In case where competing claims exist, the normative criterion of equal dignity can be applied, and those which fulfil the criterion are deemed as acceptable. Thus, the model takes a step toward addressing the limit in Sen's framework that people cannot consensually identify injustice in the face of social reality.

Secondly, expanding beyond Sen's concept of comprehensive outcomes, the model augmented with equal dignity explicitly directs society to include those excluded from public reasoning in it. The model, then, asks the wider range of interlocutors to deliberate and discuss so as to consensually identify injustices pertaining to contentious subjects on which even the normative criterion would have difficulty in giving a verdict. Anticipating more invigorated operation of public reasoning by the voice of those previously excluded, the model takes another concrete step to addressing the limit in Sen's theoretical framework that people cannot consensually identify injustice.

Finally, the concept of equal dignity is invoked by those striving to bring about emancipatory changes and embedded in legal frameworks in a variety of social contexts. Thus, adding the concept of equal dignity to the model will not undermine the pragmatic advantage of Sen's theoretical framework of justice.

Next, in order to develop the theoretical model further, the thesis identified Nancy Fraser's concept of Subaltern Counter Publics (SCP) as *a more grounded strategy in practice*. Fraser's theory of public spheres starts with a critical view that in practice, the main and official public sphere is often dominated by the privileged. Nonetheless, Fraser argues that people excluded from and/or marginalised in the main public sphere can come together, collectively build a counter discourse and create their own public sphere. Calling the group of people an SCP, Fraser argued that an SCP can work as a voice of dissent, invigorating public reasoning by coordinating with other publics and disseminating its counter discourse into wider publics. Fraser theorises that an SCP's emancipatory potential rests on its dual function: on the one hand, it works as the space of withdrawal and regroupment for those excluded from and/or marginalised in public reasoning and thus they can formulate oppositional interpretations of their identities, interests and needs; on the other hand, the SCP functions as bases and training grounds for agitational activities

directed toward wider publics including those in the main and official public sphere. According to Fraser, such operation of an SCP may result in emancipatory changes by prompting the interlocutors to critically reflect on their claims for justice, forming alternative public opinion and pressurising the government to bring in new legislation to facilitate the emancipation.

Therein, I argued that Fraser's concept of SCP encapsulates the dynamic operation of public reasoning in practice and thus aptly augments Sen's theoretical framework of justice which has limits due to the remaining idealisations and over-individualised focus in his concept of public reasoning. This is because Fraser's concept of SCP introduces to the model the missing collective dimension of a movement for change by those excluded from and/or marginalised in public reasoning. It also embodies the intersubjective dimension of public reasoning on the ground where an SCP's voice of dissent comes in dialogue with other interlocutors', prompting them to critically examine their claims and beliefs. Furthermore, the concept of SCP is a perfect complement to the model augmented with the normative criterion of equal dignity which upholds more socially inclusive operation of public reasoning.

As such, in Chapter 2, through the philosophical discussion, the following theoretical model was developed:

***A theoretical model for reducing injustice***

(1) The normative criterion to decide on competing claims for justice and to have implications for equal participation in public reasoning (the concept of equal dignity)

+

(2)The procedure to move a situation towards greater justice (Sen's theoretical framework of justice)

+

(3) A more grounded strategy in practice to actualise the justice-promoting potential of public reasoning through greater inclusion (Fraser's concept of SCP)

The theoretical model developed in Chapter 2 is a useful framework to specify both the idea of justice and a potential path to promote it. First of all, its strength lies in its explicit provision of the normative criterion of equal dignity. By knowing what constitute injustice, users of the model can judge what counts as a more or less just state of affairs. Secondly, the model proposes the procedure to move a situation towards one which better fulfils the normative criterion of equal dignity. The procedure is Sen's theoretical framework of justice which is centred on public reasoning. Thirdly, the model has the concept of an SCP which is a more grounded strategy in practice to actualise the justice-promoting potential of public reasoning. With this augmentation, the model is now applicable to real-world contexts where

struggles against injustice are taking place, and is ready to gain empirical feedback to be developed further.

### 3. Applying the theoretical model to empirical contexts

In Chapter 3, the thesis embarked on empirical exploration by applying the theoretical model to real-world contexts. For this, I used the secondary studies on an anti-FGM campaign in Upper Egypt (Ibrahim, 2014) and a pavement and slum dwellers' movement originated from Mumbai, India (Appadurai, 2001, 2004; Patel and Mitlin, 2004; SPARC, 2018).

First of all, through the lens of the model, the FGM campaign was seen as a manifestation of an SCP. This is because rural women who were previously excluded from public reasoning created their own groups and, in collaboration with a local NGO, began to question the publicly endorsed custom of FGM. Through its campaign, the SCP built and disseminated the anti-FGM discourse that the practice should be stopped because it would not only severely undermine women's health and bodily integrity but also threaten their lives. Thus, the model identified the SCP as a justice-promoting one because its counter discourse is conducive to social change which better fulfils the normative criterion of equal dignity.

The exploration also brought attention that in identifying the practice of FGM as injustice, the campaigners did not invoke the concept of equal dignity. Rather, it illuminated that they collectively stood up against FGM due to its immediate serious harms to women. Nonetheless, these campaigners utilised the concept of rights – an expression of equal dignity – in order to advance its fight against FGM.

The exploration also underscored the conflictual and dynamic nature of public reasoning invigorated by the SCP. In this empirical context, there existed a variety of people who resisted the campaign, and thus, despite the SCP's efforts, FGM was neither identified as injustice nor was eradicated in the community. Nonetheless, the exploration illuminated that the SCP's campaign shifted the public reasoning on the status of FGM in favour of its eradication. This is exemplified by the fact that after a decade of contestations, converging with the supportive discourse and legislation from the Egyptian government, the SCP's counter discourse helped to persuade more and more people not to circumcise their daughters.

The way the SCP helped bring about this change signifies that the justice-promoting operation of the SCP was not stand-alone, but significantly influenced by another entity – i.e., the government. This finding tightly fits with Fraser's core proposition that in practice, there exist multiple publics and, among them, a strong public which has both opinion formation and legislative power plays a key role in facilitating the campaign of an SCP.

Next, the theoretical model was applied to the empirical context where the pavement and slum dwellers' movement was fighting against injustice. First of all, through the lens of the model, the movement was seen as a manifestation of an SCP.

This is because the urban poor who were previously excluded from public reasoning created their own groups and, in collaboration with a local NGO, began to tackle the severe poverty and question the dominant development practice led by experts. Through a variety of activities, the SCP built and disseminated the counter discourse that pavement and slum dwellers should come at the centre of urban development planning. The counter discourse also articulated that the pro-poor development practice would require city authorities and development agencies to take their rights seriously and to provide them with appropriate infrastructure through public investment. The model identified the SCP as a justice-promoting one because its counter discourse is conducive to social change which better fulfils the normative criterion of equal dignity.

The exploration also brought attention that in identifying the severe poverty perpetuated by the exclusionary development practice as injustice, those involved in the movement did not invoke the concept of equal dignity. Rather, it illuminated that they collectively took action to improve their immediate circumstances of severe poverty and exclusion. Nonetheless, they utilised the concept of rights – an expression of equal dignity – in negotiating with governmental and international development agencies.

The exploration also underscored the conflictual and dynamic nature of public reasoning invigorated by the SCP. This is because even after the decade-long contestations by the SCP, the interlocutors had yet to have a shared view of how urban housing and infrastructure should be organised in a way that reflects the rights of all who live in the city. Nevertheless, the SCP's movement began to become more powerful by converging with other like-minded organisations in the global south. The SCP also came into partnership with university institutions to make its counter discourse stronger so as to convince more stakeholders of its claim. This finding resonates with Fraser's argument that inter-public coordination is key for an SCP to succeed in effectively disseminating its counter discourse.

Related to this, the SCP's movement was significantly affected by the preferences of international donors which provided it with financial resources, and by the government policies which affected the flow of financial resources. Thus, despite Fraser (1990, 2008) being silent about this, the exploration drew attention that for SCPs' sustainable operation, resources from other organisations are necessary.

As such, Chapter 3 brought out three key findings critical for developing the model further. Firstly, the exploration underscored that in both empirical contexts, public reasoning was illuminated as a conflictual and contested process where a variety of interlocutors contest over what counts as justice and injustice. In the face of such dynamic operation of public reasoning, the value-added of the more grounded strategy – i.e., SCP – and the normative criterion – i.e., equal dignity – in

the model became evident as they helped narrow down the focus of exploration on the justice-promoting SCPs.

However, Chapter 3 also questioned the justice theorists' claim that ideal theories and principles help people criticise social reality (see Chapter 1. Section 2) and my discussion that the concept of equal dignity is invoked by many social justice struggles (see Chapter 2. Section 3). The SCP members in Egypt and India did not need the concept of equal dignity in order to mobilise against their immediate, problematic situations. It is true that the concept of equal dignity, in the expression of rights, underlay their counter discourses. Nevertheless, only after translating the everyday language used by those involved in the movements into theoretical one used in the model, their mobilisation against the problematic situations was seen as their 'identification of injustice through public reasoning'. Thus, the exploration drew attention to the incommensurable languages used in justice theorising and by those fighting against injustice on the ground. It also pointed to the inevitability of practice-for-theory translation in giving an account of critical real-world phenomena as discussed in Chapter 1. Section 3.

Secondly, Chapter 3 also drew attention to the complexity and relationality entailed in SCPs' operation. Particularly noteworthy is that in both empirical cases, multiple groups consisting of quite diverse people (both the marginalised and professionals) comprised an SCP. Furthermore, the operation of other governmental, non-governmental and international organisations had leverage on how the SCPs operate. The finding suggested that in exploring SCPs, it is necessary to be open for their unexpected operation which may involve a large number of people and organisations in a highly complex manner.

Related to this, I drew attention that individuals' coming together as the SCPs transformed themselves and resulted in generating the trans-individual discursive forces. This finding was also brought up by Ibrahim (2014) and Appadurai (2004) who associated the emergence of the SCPs with the development of 'navigational capacity' amongst the members. 'Navigational capacity' is commonly conceptualised in anthropological theories as the capacity to plan a route for a goal and attempt to actualise the goal by 'being conscious of the links between a wide range of means and ends' (Appadurai, 2004, p.68). Expanding beyond their analysis, I suggested that the finding of collective transformation of the members may be better understood in reference to Fraser's key argument of 'SCP's dual function' mentioned in Chapter 2. Section 4: on the one hand, an SCP works as the space of withdrawal and regroupment for those marginalised and thus they can formulate oppositional interpretations of their identities, interests and needs; on the other hand, the SCP functions as bases and training grounds for agitational activities directed toward wider publics including those in the main and official public sphere.

Thirdly, while Fraser's theory suggests that an SCP works by generating trans-individual discursive force, the exploration in Chapter 3 showed that its members'

actions also played an important role in promoting the SCP's goals. Therein, I pointed out that for the SCPs' campaign to be successful, their counter discourses needed to become convincing by substantiating the feasibility of their claims by action and gaining trust from other interlocutors. Thus, the exploration underscored the necessity of closely examining how important actions are for SCP's campaign to develop the model further.

Despite bringing out the three key findings, the exploration in Chapter 3 stopped short of giving us an in-depth understanding of these SCPs. Thus, in order to develop the model further, the thesis proceeded to a thorough empirical exploration of a justice-promoting SCP based on my own fieldwork in rural West Bengal, India.

**4. Empirical exploration of an SCP in West Bengal I**

With the objective of gaining a thorough understanding of a justice-promoting SCP, Chapter 5 explored the complexity entailed in the operation of the West Bengal SCP. Thus, the exploration placed its focus on illuminating *who have been involved in the SCP and how*.

Through the application of the model, three groups – i.e., the NGO JDS, and the rural women's groups AB and CD – were identified as a manifestation of an SCP. This is because the women were previously excluded from public reasoning and gained entrance to the public discussion on the status of women only through forming their own groups and building a counter discourse in collaboration with the NGO. The model identified the SCP as a justice-promoting one because the SCP questions the widespread local beliefs and practices which severely oppress women and girls, and aims to promote gender equality.

With the language used in the model, the three groups' mobilisation was translated as the SCP members' consensual identification of the oppression of women and girls as injustice through public reasoning. Nevertheless, the exploration brought attention that in mobilising against the oppression, these women did not invoke the concept of equal dignity. Rather, they acted to change the problematic situations in their locality. Thus, the application of the model underscored the incommensurable languages used in justice theorising and by those fighting against injustice on the ground as in the case of Chapter 3.

The application of the model also highlighted the conflictual and dynamic nature of public reasoning in this empirical context. In particular, at its incipient stage, the SCP faced resistance by villagers who upheld gendered social norms. However, through its mobilisation for the 26 years, the SCP has prompted villagers to reflect on the oppressive situation of women and even succeeded in convincing many of them to act in promotion of gender justice. Therein, in discussing this justice-promoting change, I drew attention that there have been social changes in the wider context over time which have contributed towards such positive changes

across India. That said, I concluded that the SCP has contributed to reducing the injustice of oppression of women and girls in the local area.

Expanding beyond the key findings from Chapter 3 of the complexity entailed in SCPs and the importance of action to promote their goals, the exploration of Chapter 5 brought out three critical findings.

Firstly, the three groups comprising the SCP take different approaches to facilitate their activities, by utilising both discussion and action to different degrees. The exploration illuminated that each group's distinct approaches have played critical roles in building and effectively disseminating the SCP's counter discourse into wider publics. The NGO's rather ideological approach has played a critical role in strengthening the SCP's counter discourse with the idiom of rights – which rests on the concept of equal dignity – as a discursive resource. Its ideological approach may also explain why the SCP's campaign has developed in such way that it more adequately fulfil the normative criterion of equal dignity. More concretely, the SCP mobilised by problematising the most conspicuous forms of oppression of women (i.e., physical and sexual violence) and now tackling less noticeable ones (i.e., lack of opportunities for women and girls to play sports). On the other hand, AB's and CD's approaches, characterised by actually engaging in discussion with stakeholders and acting to promote their goals, have played an important role in substantiating the feasibility of their claims, gaining trust from villagers and eventually garnering support for the SCP. In the light of such complex operation of the SCP, I questioned both Fraser's conceptualisation of an SCP and Sen's theorisation of public reasoning because both of them heavily rest on their discursive features while overlooking the importance of action.

Secondly, Chapter 5 brought to light the link between each group's distinct approach and the group members' diverse experiences and positionalities in relation to the oppressive situation. The NGO staff are educated professionals, coming from outside the villages, and thus carry out its programs by utilising the idiom of human rights and overtly asserting what is wrong and right. AB takes a rather action-oriented approach because the group was formed and led by very action-oriented village women who acted to help victims of their own accord. AB's strategy to complement its action-oriented approach with carefully listening to and talking with stakeholders (including both victims and perpetrators) is explicable by the fact that they are rural women who have to go back to their home in the community at the end of the day. CD's most dialogic approach centred on visiting and talking with villagers at length to eradicate the practice of child marriage can be explained by the fact that most of the group members have been the victims of oppression in the villages. In order to facilitate the group's campaign, CD members must have utilised their personal experience of negotiating oppression through patiently and continuously communicating with their oppressors. In response to this finding that the SCP consists of quite heterogeneous people, I questioned Fraser's initial

theorisation (1990) which gives one an impression that SCP is made up of only marginalised people. I, then, argued that Fraser's later theorisation (2008) that quite diverse kinds of people come together with a shared concern about an issue and form a public better captures the heterogeneity within the SCP.

Thirdly, Chapter 5 illuminated that the SCP operates in tandem with other organisations and people which provide it with critical resources such as financial and technical resources as well as spaces where discussions can take place. Chapter 5 further revealed that these resources connect the three groups – the NGO and the two women's groups – with each other as well as with outside organisations and people in an organic way. The organic operation of an SCP was theorised by Fraser (1990) in reference to 'inter public coordination' to disseminate its discourse into wider publics. Nonetheless, I highlighted that when the input of these critical resources is cut down, the SCP's operation is severely inhibited. Thus, I argued that an SCP's operation is never adequately understood when one treats it as an independent, stand-alone entity.

Bringing a close light on *who has been involved in this SCP and how*, the three findings from Chapter 5 drew attention to the important and paradoxical operation of this SCP – which I called *complex unity*. That is, on the one hand, this SCP operates in a very *complex* manner as it consists of the three groups which are made by different kinds of people. Each group also adopts different approaches for facilitating its activities, utilising both discussions and actions to a different degree. In addition, the SCP's operation is both facilitated and inhibited by a number of other organisations and people which provide it with technical, material and financial resources. On the other hand, this SCP is *united* as the three groups remain cohesive with the shared goal of gender justice and collectively generate the toward-gender-equality discourse amid oppressive social norms widespread in the region. In addition, this SCP operates in tandem with a large number of other organisations and people in an organic, united way.

Strongly resonating with the findings from Chapter 3, the exploration in Chapter 5 became a critical step toward gaining a thorough understanding of justice-promoting SCPs so as to develop the model further.

**5. Empirical exploration of an SCP in West Bengal II**

In Chapter 6, the thesis took a further step to gain a thorough understanding of the justice-promoting SCP in West Bengal. Building on the findings from Chapter 5, Chapter 6 explored how it became possible for quite diverse people to form the SCP and how they have been able to continue the campaign over the past 26 years. In order to advance this inquiry, I drew on the concept of agency which in the capability approach literature is conceptualised as 'the ability to pursue goals that one values and has reason to value' (Alkire and Deneulin, 2009, p.31).

Chapter 6 brought to light a very important finding by seriously questioning the conceptualisation of agency commonly used in the literature which tends to place a strong emphasis on individuals' agency. In theorising the link between agency and justice-promoting changes, Sen (2010, p.287), for example, mentions individuals with exceptional capacities such as Mohandas Gandhi and Martin Luther King Jr. In so doing, he does not pay due attention to the fact that these exceptional individuals contributed to justice-promoting changes only through being part of wider SCPs (India's independence movement and American Civil Rights struggle, respectively).

In contrast to Sen's identification of a person's agency with justice-promoting changes, Chapter 6 demonstrated that the collective strength of this SCP is built through *relational agency*. Chapter 6 confirmed that 'in the beginning' of this SCP 'there is the relation' (Donati, 2011, cited by Burkitt, 2018, p. 523) and this SCP produces particular effects in the world and on its members through their relational connection and in joint actions (Burkitt, 2016, 2018).

It is true that currently, this SCP consists of individuals with exceptional capacities. They are capable of doing critical reflection, have the capacity to hold discussion even in the face of obstacles and demonstrate impressive navigational capacity. They also have a very strong sense of compassion for people who are suffering and passion for gender justice. Thus, in Chapter 6, I proposed that the agency of the SCP members actualises through their exercising these capacities fuelled by compassion for people who are suffering and passion for gender justice.

Nevertheless, Chapter 6 drew further attention that both the SCP members' capacities and critical emotions have come to develop through their interactions and establishing enabling relationships with those in the SCP and outside of it (e.g., villagers and family). It further illuminated that the development of their agency and the emergence and evolution of the SCP take place concomitantly, reinforcing each other.

The exploration in Chapter 6 also brought out two more findings which have clear implications for further developing the theoretical model. Firstly, two of the emerging capacities – critical reflection and capacity to hold discussion – tightly fit with the concept of 'political functioning' (Bohman, 1996, 1997) which refers to persuasive discussion capacity, capacities of framing and reframing a debate and strong reasoning capacity to deal with conflicting views (see Chapter 2. Section 2). This tight fit between the empirical exploration in West Bengal and Bohman's theoretical work can be seen to support the view that 'political functioning' is indispensable for people to engage in public reasoning. This consensus is important as Sen simply presumes that people are already capable of engaging in public reasoning.

The exploration in Chapter 6 also suggested that navigational capacity coupled with relevant knowledge is necessary for people to actualise this 'political

functioning' in public reasoning. This is because, in the first place, people need to have relevant knowledge on the discussion subject to engage in public reasoning. In the second place, as the space for public reasoning is neither pre-made nor static in practice, people need to have navigational capacity of being well-versed in where to go, whom to talk to and how in each context.

Finally, Chapter 6 revealed that people's strong use of public reasoning – contemplation over what we owe to each other in society/community – becomes possible not through the reasoning device of 'impartial spectator' (Sen, 2010) but the emerging capacities as well as *compassion* and *passion* nurtured and strengthened through enabling interpersonal relationships. The finding that these emotions are critical is important because, traditionally, social justice theorists have tended to ascribe a critical role only to cognitive capacities, in particular, critical reflection. These theorists – exemplified by Plato and the Stoics – have seen emotions as harmful to public life, arguing that emotions should not be present in public reasoning and be confined to private life (Pereira, 2013). The discussion of Chapter 6, on the contrary, underscored the importance of compassion and passion which drove the SCP members to radically question and challenge the oppressive situation of women in the region and made them cohesive to promote gender justice. The finding tightly fits with the proposition by Nussbaum (2001, 2006, 2013) and Gasper and Comim (2019) who theorise moral sentiments including compassion as critical for promoting justice.

**6. The further development of the model with the empirical findings**

The empirical explorations carried out in Chapters 3, 5 and 6 brought out significant findings as follows. Firstly, public reasoning is not a magic bullet to identify and remedy injustice by default. It is a conflictual and dynamic process in which interlocutors fight for their claims of justice through communicative interactions wherein counter discourses by those previously excluded from it play a critical role. Because of this conflictual and dynamic nature of public reasoning in practice, the value-added of the normative criterion of equal dignity and the more grounded expression of SCP in the model became evident. That is, the model enabled the thesis to narrow down its focus on justice-promoting SCPs in empirical contexts.

Secondly, despite the value-added, the concept of equal dignity was not invoked by the SCP members in practice. Nonetheless, the explorations also showed that the concept underlies the SCPs' counter discourses in the expression of rights. In the case of the West Bengal SCP, the concept of rights was actively utilised as a discursive resource to strengthen its arguments. In relation to this, I pointed out the inevitability of *practice-for-theory translation* in the face of the incommensurable languages used in justice theorising and by those fighting against injustice on the ground. Building on Robeyns's (2008) proposition of social justice research in Chapter 1. Section 3, I would like to argue that such translation becomes critical in

any attempt to gain empirical feedback on a justice theory so as to enhance its practical relevance.

Thirdly, the explorations showed that the SCP members' actions play an important role in effectively disseminating their counter discourses into wider publics. This is because for the SCPs' campaign to be successful, their counter discourses need to be strengthened and become convincing by substantiating the feasibility of their claims by action. The exploration in Chapter 6 also illuminated that the actions of the SCP members led to gaining trust from interlocutors and garnering their support for the SCP.

Fourthly, the empirical exploration in Chapter 6 brought to light the overlapping consensus between its finding and the theoretical work by Bohman (1996, 1997) that without having critical reasoning and discussion capacities, people cannot engage in public reasoning. While the empirical finding of Chapter 6 adds the navigational capacity to Bohman's concept of 'political functioning', the consensus demonstrated that for public reasoning to actualise its justice-promoting potential, the interlocutors must have these capacities.

Finally, regarding the operation of SCPs, the empirical explorations in Chapters 3, 5 and 6 brought out the two key findings of complex unity and relational agency. The first finding of complex unity refers to both intra and inter dynamics of SCPs which sustain their operation in an organic way. Expanding beyond Fraser's argument on 'inter-public coordination' for the successful operation of an SCP, this finding elucidates that an SCP collaborates with other organisations not only to disseminate its counter discourse but also to be provided with critical resources necessary for its sustainable operation. The other key finding of relational agency posits that an SCP manifests itself through the members' coming together, developing each other's capacities, critical emotions and establishing enabling interpersonal relationships within the SCP and outside it. Expanding beyond Fraser's argument on 'SCP's dual function' which captures the collective and inter-subjective dimensions of public reasoning, the finding of relational agency underscores the importance of incorporating the emotional dimension of public reasoning and a relational perspective into theorising justice.

While more empirical explorations are called for to confirm the applicability of the findings to other SCPs, the model is further developed in response to the findings as below:

***A theoretical model for reducing injustice***

(1) The normative criterion to decide on competing claims for justice and to have implications for equal participation in public reasoning (the concept of equal dignity)

+

**(1.A) The concept of equal dignity underlies justice-promoting SCPs' counter discourses and can serve as a discursive resource**

+

(2)The procedure to move a situation towards greater justice (Sen's theoretical framework of justice)

+

**(2.A) People's capacities of critical reflection, of holding discussion and navigational capacity need to be adequately developed for them to engage in public reasoning**

+

**(2.B) Public reasoning consists of not only exchanging ideas and disseminating discourses but also actions to substantiate them**

+

(3) A more grounded strategy in practice to actualise the justice-promoting potential of public reasoning through greater inclusion (Fraser's concept of SCP)

+

**(3.A) SCP's operation with complex unity (An SCP, consisting of a variety of people, operates in touch with other organisations and people who give it technical, material and financial resources)**

+

**(3.B) SCP's manifestation through relational agency (An SCP members' agency actualises through having emerging capacities, passion and compassion, developed through enabling relationships within the SCP and outside it)**

## 7. Practical implications

This thesis is not a study which prescribes suitable policies and actions to reduce injustice in each specific empirical context, but rather a theoretical and empirical exploration of ways to promote justice. Nonetheless, the theoretical model further developed in this chapter has some clear implications which guide practical actions and policies for the promotion of greater justice.

In the first place, the model posits that public reasoning is the procedure to reduce injustice in practice. Thus, for the proper, justice-promoting operation of public reasoning, people's critical reflection, discussion and navigational capacities need to be adequately developed. This requirement suggests that in addition to the provision of basic education that promotes literacy and numeracy, it is important that opportunities exist for people to develop these capacities relationally as they mobilise for change.

In the second place, the theoretical model proposes that the justice-promoting potential of public reasoning may be actualised by SCPs which bring more diverse voices into public reasoning. Thus, those who wish to promote justice might want

to support SCPs. In attempting to support them, the model further points to three important practical demands.

Firstly, in order to judge whether an SCP deserves support, one has to critically reflect on its justice claim as there exist many SCPs which strive to undermine certain people's dignity and promote injustice. An example in India would be the far-right Hindu nationalist movement. In this sense, supporting an SCP requires one to engage in reasoning of what should be seen as a justifiable public goal. To identify an SCP as justice-promoting, I advocate for one to examine whether its counter discourse meets the normative criterion of equal dignity.

Secondly, while supporting justice-promoting SCPs is critical, the supporters should bear in mind the dynamics and complex unity entailed in their operation as shown in Chapters 3 and 5. For a justice-promoting SCP to convince the interlocutors to agree with its identification of injustice and to take action to remedy the injustice, it takes substantial time. And the process tends to be a thorny road with much trial and error. Thus, the supporters should not stick to the traditional short-term, project-management format of support. Rather, they should engage in dialogue with the SCPs so as to understand what they need at each point of time.

Thirdly and more importantly, it is necessary for different actors to converge to support a justice-promoting SCP, and whoever would be their supporters, it is critical for them to establish enabling interpersonal relationships with the SCP members. Giving them requested technical support through training and financial aid through project fund is important but how the supporters do so also significantly matters. As shown in Chapter 6, once enabling relationships are in place, they significantly contribute to the development of the agency of the SCP members, further developing their capacities, passion and compassion, resulting in the more powerful operation of the SCP.

Finally, the thesis concludes with advancing some proposals to address the momentous task of '*coming up with a better way*' presented by the Black Lives Matter example in Chapter 1. Firstly, given the justice-promoting potential of public reasoning which may be enhanced by SCPs, building a more robust counter discourse is clearly critical in the course of social justice. Such a robust counter discourse might usefully include the presentation of claims (i.e., what are the problems), necessary responses (e.g., legislation or/and change of people's behaviours), and specification of those expected to give the responses (e.g., national, state and city governments or/and police officers and judges).

Secondly, the model suggests that incubating spaces where people can come together to discuss their goals and interests are useful in enabling such counter discourse to emerge. The incubating spaces might also help to make the campaign more powerful by encouraging communicative interactions among people and contributing to relational development of their critical capacities, passion and compassion.

Thirdly, in the light of the model, violence which may result in undermining dignity of victims is difficult to justify as a means to take the campaign forward. The model upholds the normative criterion of equal dignity such that for a campaign to count as a justice-promoting one, its counter discourse as well as actions need to fulfil the criterion.

Finally and most importantly, those who wish to promote justice – ranging from individuals, corporations, NGOs to public officials – need to converge to support campaigns against racial injustice. We should not suggest that the 16-year-old boy alone can '*come up with a better way'*. The model suggests that due to the long-term and unpredictable nature of the campaigns, constant dialogue between campaigners and supports is necessary. It then posits that such dialogue has a potential to establish enabling relationships between campaigners and supports, which may strongly encourage and motivate the campaigners to continuously fight for racial justice.

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